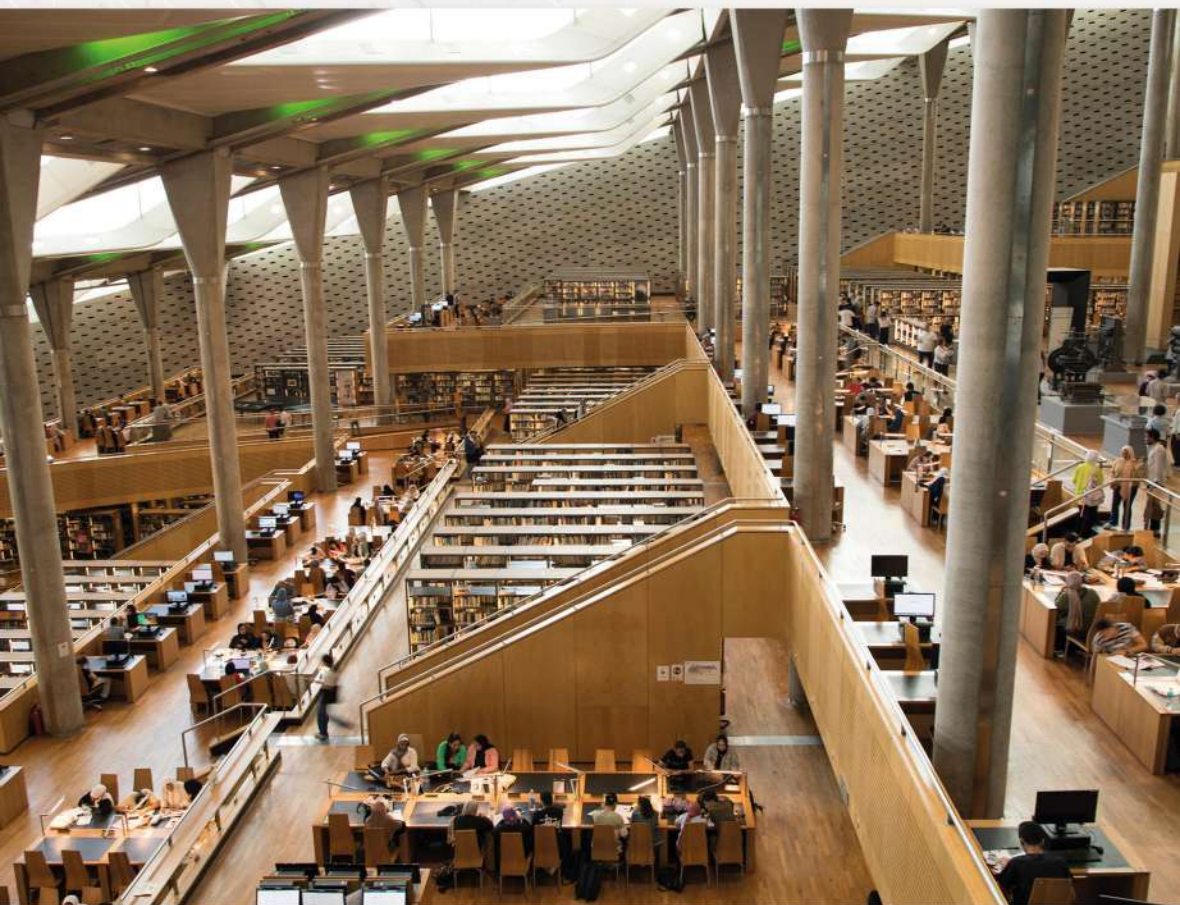


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Analytic Islamic Epistemology

Critical Debates

EDITED BY SAFARUK CHOWDHURY
AND RAMON HARVEY

ANALYTIC ISLAMIC EPISTEMOLOGY

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SAFARUK CHOWDHURY AND
RAMON HARVEY

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No envisioned output was more significant in shaping the project as a whole than the present text. Whereas other books and articles were mainly the result of our individual efforts, the collected volume was always intended as the nexus for active dialogue and engagement with the wider intellectual community. To that end, we conducted three events: two online workshops in May and November of 2021 on premodern Islamic and comparative religious epistemology, respectively, followed by a residential International Symposium at the Møller Institute in Cambridge in July 2022. We would like to express our gratitude to every scholar who joined us for one of these events, as a presenter or respondent, virtually or in person.

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‘Over everyone with knowledge there is one all-knowing’.

The Qur’an¹

‘It is incumbent upon those who believe in the Law and obey its command to reflect upon existents that, prior to reflecting, they become acquainted with such things as occupy in reflection the place of tools in practical activity’.

Ibn Rushd (Averroes)²

1 Q. 12:76.

2 Ibn Rushd, *Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl*, p. 7.

Introduction: From Islamic Theology to Analytic Philosophy

Safaruk Chowdhury and Ramon Harvey

The period in Arabia before the coming of Islam is referred to in the Qur'an as the Jāhiliyya, which is sometimes translated as the Age of Ignorance.¹ Notwithstanding legitimate queries about the extent to which the image of pre-Islamic Arabia was shaped by the interests of distinct early Muslim audiences,² there is a genuine sense in which the Islamic civilisation that subsequently emerged saw itself as bringing the ideal of knowledge (*ilm*) to perfection.³ This included the encounter with existing religious and philosophical traditions, the translation of prevailing approaches to knowledge into Arabic, and their integration within diverse Islamic scholarly cultures. Such optimism about the potential for the realisation of knowledge contrasts with the popular Western imagination of Islam as antipathetic to intellectual inquiry. Although this misconception has thankfully been banished within serious scholarly conversation, the relationship of traditional Islamic frameworks of thought to the wider debates of contemporary religious epistemology remains an open question.

In the context of Western academia, these wider debates have been historically dominated by Christian religious epistemology. In the Anglophone world, this has led to Christian philosophers and theologians coming to

1 Within the scripture, the Jāhiliyya is associated with impiety, injustice, lewdness and rage. See Q. 3:154, 5:50, 33:33, 48:26. This may lead to the view that it is the antithesis of *hilm* (forbearance), rather than *ilm* (knowledge), although these moral defects can also be associated with ignorance. See Khatab, *The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb*, p. 2. Appreciation is due to Michael Mumisa for highlighting this point in person.

2 See Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, pp. 257–58.

3 Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 2. He writes: “*ilm* is one of those concepts that have dominated Islam and given Muslim civilization its distinctive shape and complexion. In fact, there is no other concept that has been operative as a determinant of Muslim civilization in all its aspects to the same extent as *ilm*’.

terms with the way in which their own tradition deals with religious knowledge within the dominant paradigm of analytic philosophy. This discourse is at least half a century old, having reached a state of considerable maturity and nuance. Yet, the emergence of global approaches to philosophy of religion has disrupted the Christian hegemony in religious epistemology. Other religious discourses, including those of Islam, not only have their own intellectual agendas with which they engage with the resources offered by Christian thinking, but they also pose new questions that may challenge existing ideas and eventually reshape the field into a more dynamic and multipolar reality.

The present volume was conceived from the outset as a founding document of analytic Islamic epistemology. That is, with it we seek to constitute a new subfield of academic study, although we recognise that individual scholarly work germane to it already exists. Analytic Islamic epistemology can be defined as the use of intellectual frameworks drawn from the analytic tradition to explore and extend epistemological questions relevant to Islamic theology. A couple of caveats are in order. First, as an initial foray into this field of study, the reader will not only encounter the writing of epistemologists within the pages of this book. To map major contours of epistemological thought within Islam in an adequate fashion – despite recognising that inevitably many interesting developments cannot be covered – it was necessary to bring on board intellectual historians specialised in various Islamic periods and traditions. Second, our focus on the analytic tradition does not signal any intended slight towards the philosophical approach known as the continental or, perhaps better, phenomenological tradition. Despite valuing the insights of this latter approach, we recognise that any serious engagement with it would require the complex navigation of an alternative discourse with its own canons and relationship to religious truth. In any case, the analytic tradition (in its Christian-mediated guise) with its focus on rigorous definition and logical argument represented a more attractive initial conversation partner for taking stock of Islamic religious epistemology past and present.

In the remainder of this Introduction, we shall set out in greater detail the appropriate preliminaries to the contributions made by the fifteen chapters collected herein. We start with a broad overview of epistemological tendencies within the Islamic tradition, introducing the main groupings and approaches that will inform many of the essays in this volume. We will then turn to the Western tradition and trace some of the major perspectives in religious epistemology since the Enlightenment, which serve as the intellectual context for the dialogue that we aim to broach between the two discourses. Next, we shall undertake a more precise operation of bridging the gap between the classical Islamic tradition and the categories of contemporary analytic epistemology. Thereafter, we present a case-study

of the epistemology of a major early Islamic theologian, Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944). This acts both to provide a detailed illustration of the ideas already surveyed and to present an influential and original Islamic epistemological system that will not otherwise feature in the book. Then, we shall briefly discuss recent trends in Islamic religious epistemology which, in light of what has preceded, present the current moment and its challenges. Finally, we will introduce the five parts of the book and the three chapters in each, as well as offer some general notes to aid the reader.

Epistemological Tendencies in the Islamic Tradition

Muslim scholarly (and popular) literature on the topic of knowledge is vast. Many scholars have dedicated an entire book or substantial chapter to discussing knowledge, its importance and its various forms. These works often aimed to define knowledge in terms of its religious, ethical and practical significance. Muslim scholars across the fields of Qur'an, Hadith, law, theology and more have frequently discussed knowledge in the context of its necessity for understanding and practising Islam. They have drawn on Qur'anic verses and hadiths of the Prophet Muḥammad to underscore the divine endorsement of seeking knowledge. They have also stressed the holistic integration of knowledge with belief (*īmān*) and ethical conduct (*akhlāq* or *adab*).⁴ The Islamic scriptural sources emphasise the pursuit of knowledge to strengthen one's faith. Knowledge is seen as a prerequisite for true belief, as it enables believers to understand and internalise religious teachings. In fact, the relationship between knowledge and belief is one of interdependency, since true belief cannot exist without knowledge, and knowledge is incomplete without belief. Scholarly discussions have often revolved around the degrees of certainty that could be found in different kinds of knowledge and their impact on the firmness and quality of faith. This has also led to a differentiation between mere uncritical belief (*taqlīd*) and an informed faith based on verification (*taḥqīq*) through knowledge, the latter being a result of greater epistemic exertion and grace from God.⁵

To begin to do justice to the range of discourses within the Islamic tradition aligning with the notion of 'analytic epistemology', it is important to take a broad compass. A major Islamic expression of this field is found within the discipline of *'ilm al-kalām* (rational theology). This method of rational discourse for the defence and articulation of scriptural truths – paradigmatically practised in Arabic – was not only the mainstay of major Islamic schools, such as the Ash'arīs, Māturīdīs, Mu'tazila and the Imāmī and Zaydī Shī'a, but even found its adherents amongst Jewish and

4 Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief*, pp. 128–47, 196–237.

5 Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief*, pp. 148–61.

Christian theologians.⁶ Although often in fierce contestation with one another, the practitioners of *kalām* (*mutakallimūn*) were invested in a shared project in which they used concepts naturalised from existing philosophical discourse, such as the Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic traditions, as well as emerging 'indigenous' rational investigation, to justify core beliefs of 'aqīda (creed) as knowledge. In the opening chapters of *kalām* manuals, theologians would outline the epistemological framework that would govern the development of their arguments.⁷ Hence, these chapters discuss many topics that are broadly equivalent to those within contemporary religious epistemology.

Scholars of *kalām* also elaborated on the theme of God's knowledge as part of their theological articulation of the divine nature. God's knowledge – considered absolute, eternal (or timeless) and encompassing all things past, present and future – is contrasted with human knowledge, which is limited and contingent. The doctrine of divine omniscience was thus used to emphasise human limitations and the need for intellectual humility. It led some scholars to explore the implications of God's knowledge for understanding predestination and free will – namely, how either God's knowledge does not negate human free will, as it reflects rather than determines human choice, or how it does negate free will because its operation, in tandem with the divine will, is essentially coercive.⁸

Despite the wide acknowledgement that there is an unknowable and incomprehensible aspect to God's nature, Muslim theologians have investigated how human beings can know God, focusing on the means and limits of acquiring such knowledge through reason and revelation.⁹ They proposed that knowledge of God is the highest form of knowledge and is only attainable by deeply examining the signs and portents of God in creation and ourselves. Alongside this, they often drew a distinction between knowledge of God's attributes (*ṣifāt*) and knowledge of His underlying essence or complete essential nature (*dhāt*). Some scholars deemed the former possible (albeit to a limited degree) *via* rational inference, while thinking the latter utterly beyond human comprehension.¹⁰ Scholars also discussed the role of the messengers and revealed scriptures in conveying

6 For general discussion, see Frank, 'The Science of *Kalām*'. A summary of relevant groups can be found in Harvey, 'Theology, Islamic'. Details of Jewish and Christian discourses are in Ben-Shammai, 'Kalām in Medieval Jewish Philosophy', pp. 124–36, and Griffith, 'Faith and Reason in Christian Kalām', pp. 2–4.

7 For a survey of the epistemological categories and terms discussed within *kalām*, see Doko and Turner, 'Islamic Religious Epistemology', pp. 149–51.

8 Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 108–29.

9 Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 129–41.

10 Shehadi, *Ghazālī's Unique and Unknowable God*, pp. 40–49, and Mohamed, *Ghazālī's Epistemology*, pp. 99–101.

knowledge about God inaccessible to human reason by itself. Additionally, some held that true human knowledge of God was only possible following a process of intellectual and spiritual purification. In this regard, the integration of Sufi practices to achieve a deeper, experiential knowledge of God (see below), which was famously promoted by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), became a common feature of mainstream Sunnism.¹¹

As a synthesis between scripture and a certain mode of reason (one that, it should be said in light of the present topic, emphasised evidentialism), *kalām* was criticised by those with alternative commitments. For the cluster of broadly scripturalist theologies often described as Traditionalism, the approach of *kalām* to the gamut of questions surrounding warranted belief was overly intellectualised.¹² Traditionalists were concerned with safeguarding a creedal legacy that they understood to be in line with the earliest and best generations of Muslims (the Salaf), who were the most deserving to be followed in the matter of belief. These Traditionalists, often associated with the emerging Sunnī Hadith movement to collect and verify the prophetic legacy, saw true belief as not requiring the elaborate rational argumentation of *kalām* for its justification. Its correctness was instead obvious to every person with an uncorrupted natural disposition (*fiṭra*), especially upon the encounter with the accurately transmitted and taught Islamic revealed sources. This implied that belief in God ought to be established on the firm foundations of the Qur'an, the Sunna and consensus.¹³ The result is that many expressions of this tendency developed a fideistic flavour, although more intellectually nuanced versions did exist, too.¹⁴ In turn, Traditionalism was seen by practitioners of *kalām* as unsophisticated and unable to respond to new religious challenges.¹⁵

Opposition to prevailing Sunnī *kalām* and Traditionalist epistemic accounts alike was provided within the Shī'ī tradition. Shī'ī scholars highlight the special status of the Imams, a chain of successors to the Prophet Muḥammad from within his family (*ahl al-bayt*) who are seen as divinely guided and possessing superior knowledge. Thus, in Shī'ism, religious knowledge is shaped by the teaching of the Imams, which is often held to provide a living post-prophetic source of infallible guidance. Knowledge – particularly of unseen matters – is seen as a divine gift that is imparted to the Imams to guide the community and elucidate for them complex

11 Mohamed, *Ghazālī's Epistemology*, pp. 94–121.

12 See Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume 1*, pp. 386–92.

13 Abrahamov, 'Scripturalist and Traditionalist Theology', pp. 271–73.

14 For further elaboration of these two tendencies within Traditionalist religious epistemology, see Doko and Turner, 'Islamic Religious Epistemology', pp. 156–62.

15 See Frank's discussion of the polemic between al-Ash'arī and the Ḥanbalis of his era. Frank, 'Al-Ash'arī's *Kitāb al-Ḥaṭṭh 'alā l-Baḥṭh*', pp. 103–6.

theological and legal issues; hence, Shīʿī belief places a strong emphasis on an esoteric inner dimension of knowledge possessed by the Imams that is not publicly accessible to ordinary people.¹⁶

The Muslim philosophers, or *falāsifa*, meanwhile, cleaved to a stream of merged Neoplatonic and Aristotelian philosophy which, though shaped by its development within an Islamic milieu, did not style itself as a theological response to scriptural truth.¹⁷ Although still classifiable, like *kalām*, as a form of evidentialism,¹⁸ proponents of *falsafa* were committed to the continuation, albeit with their own new twist, of the epistemological categories and procedures of the Greek philosophical heritage (with some Iranian and Indian additions).¹⁹

Numerous Greek philosophical works were translated into Arabic as part of the 'translation movement' in the Abbasid period and had a profound influence on the subsequent development of Islamic epistemological discourse. Key pioneers of Muslim philosophy, such as al-Kindī (d. ca 259/873), al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) and Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198), adapted a sophisticated pre-existing lexicon and set of rational precepts to the Arabic language and Islamic public debates over knowledge.²⁰ The translation of Aristotle's works on logic (the *Organon*) and their integration into Islamic thought resulted in logic (*manṭiq*) being considered essential for acquiring and validating knowledge. Islamic philosophers saw logic as the science of correct reasoning and an essential tool to ensure the coherence and consistency of their arguments and to distinguish true knowledge from falsehood. The systematisation of logic by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, drawing heavily on Aristotle's syllogistic methods, as well as their own novel contributions, foregrounded the use of logical demonstration to attain certainty in knowledge. This philosophical epistemology was employed to support theological doctrines and indeed legal principles. Moreover, these philosophical methods were used to reconcile reason with revelation according to the premise that rational inquiry complements rather than contradicts divine revelation.²¹

16 Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 142–54.

17 Frank has commented with respect to the *falāsifa*'s stance towards the 'supramundane source of prophetic inspiration' that 'they do not hold it to be a phenomenon claims of whose divine origin belong peculiarly to a realm of religious experience, language and belief that is distinct from the the universal realm of common experience, and profane language and whose rationalisation, therefore, belongs properly to theological rather than to philosophic discourse in our contemporary sense of these terms'. Frank, 'The Science of *Kalām*', p. 245, n. 26.

18 See Booth, *Analytic Islamic Philosophy*, pp. 53, 76, 98.

19 Rudolph 'Introduction', pp. 18–21.

20 See Gutas, *Greek Thought Arabic Culture*, and Bsoul, *Translation Movement and Acculturation*.

21 Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 194–239; Inati, 'Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy', and Nuseibeh, 'Epistemology', pp. 824–40.

For the Muslim *ḥakīm*, it was the *kalām* practitioner who was unsophisticated, his dialectical argumentation a bastardised version of the demonstrative scientific ideal established within philosophy.²² Postclassical *mutakallimūn* on the whole conceded the point (a normative evaluation of whether they were correct to do so is a discussion for another place) and increasingly adopted elements of the framework of *falsafa*,²³ often under the name *ḥikma* (wisdom).²⁴ Hence, to a not inconsiderable degree, study of the postclassical *kalām* tradition is simultaneously study of the later development of *falsafa*.

Finally, we can draw attention to Sufism which, though a meaningful category in its own right, often had a certain proximity to one of the preceding trends. That is, one can find *kalām*-practising, Traditionalist and ‘philosophical’ modes of Sufi thought.²⁵ The distinctive aspect of Sufism in this epistemological context was, of course, the commitment to the relevance of a form of mystical insight to ground knowledge claims. Despite a possible relationship to one of the other exoteric categories mentioned above, Sufis were distinguished by their conviction that true knowledge could only ultimately be secured by the esoteric unveiling granted to an adept on the spiritual path.²⁶

For Sufis, knowledge is seen as a divine gift that enlightens the heart, leading to a deeper understanding of God and the self. This act of illumination is not purely intellectual but brings about moral and spiritual transformation. The metaphor of knowledge as light (*nūr*) is supposed to capture its non-discursive, mystical and experiential dimension. Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), for example, describes knowledge as a light that God casts into the heart of His servants, illuminating the path to divine proximity and understanding. Before him, al-Ghazālī in many writings used the metaphor of light to explain the intuitive and immediate nature of true knowledge, which transcends rational discourse.²⁷

Sufis distinguish between rational knowledge (*‘ilm*) and experiential, mystical knowledge (*ma‘rifa*).²⁸ While rational knowledge is based on study and intellectual effort, mystical knowledge is attained through direct,

22 See van Ess, ‘The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology’, pp. 24–26.

23 For contemporary debate over the philosophical status of postclassical *kalām*, see the contention that it is ‘paraphilosophy’ by the standard of peripatetic philosophy in Gutas, ‘Avicenna and After’, and the response that there is no good reason to hold that standard as normative in Kaukua, ‘Post-Classical Islamic Philosophy – A Contradiction in Terms?’.

24 Griffel, *The Formation of Post-Classical Philosophy in Islam*, pp. 101–2.

25 Karamustafa, *Sufism*, pp. 89–90, 97, 106; Rustom, ‘Philosophical Sufism’, p. 399.

26 Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 155–93.

27 Hesova, ‘The Notion of Illumination’, pp. 65–85.

28 Shah-Kazemi, ‘The Notion and Significance of Ma‘rifa’, pp. 155–81.

personal experience of the divine from the divine. The concept of *kashf* (unveiling) or *ilhām* (inspiration) is a cornerstone of Sufi epistemology, referring to the seeker's insight into divine truths that bypass rational thought.²⁹ For this reason, mystical knowledge is considered a higher form of knowledge that provides special insight into the divine reality that is superior to the rudimentary ways of knowing available through the senses or reasoning. Sufis argue that mystical knowledge is often acquired through spiritual practices such as meditation, *dhikr* (remembrance of God) and asceticism. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī's (d. 672/1273) poetry speaks of this mystical knowledge as a form of intimacy that is only accessible through love and union with God. However, as emphasised by al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 297/910), one of the architects of the classical Sufi tradition, the guidance of a spiritual master (*murshid* or *shaykh*) is crucial for a seeker or disciple (*murīd*) of the Sufi path to attain true knowledge before becoming an adept mystic or wayfarer (*sālik*). The spiritual *shaykh* provides instruction, models virtuous behaviour and helps the disciple navigate the spiritual path. The relationship between *shaykh* and disciple is based on trust and submission: the disciple follows the teachings and practices prescribed by the *shaykh* who is seen as a vessel of divine wisdom indispensable for spiritual growth.³⁰

Sufis often contrast inner, esoteric knowledge (*bāṭin*) with outer, exoteric knowledge (*ẓāhir*). While the exoteric pertains to the external aspects of religion, such as rituals and laws, the esoteric pertains to the hidden, inner meanings that can be accessed through spiritual insight and unveiling. The esoteric is thus considered superior to the exoteric because it provides deeper understanding and closer connection to the divine. True knowledge in Sufism, then, involves penetrating the surface to uncover the spiritual realities that lie beneath religious practices and texts.

Finally, Sufi teachings outline various stages and levels of knowledge that correspond to the seeker's spiritual progression. These stages include initial learning, spiritual awakening and eventual realisation of divine unity. The seeker begins with *'ilm al-yaqīn* (the knowledge of certainty), progresses through *'ayn al-yaqīn* (the 'eye' or essence of certainty) and reaches *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* (the truth of certainty). Each stage represents a deeper level of understanding and connection with the divine, culminating in complete unity with God's will and pleasure.³¹

29 Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought*, pp. 35–47, and Asvat, *Sufism: The Living Tradition*, pp. 67–81.

30 Honerkamp, 'The Ethical-Mystical Foundations', pp. 79–97.

31 Al-Ḥujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, pp. 381–82, and Mohamed, *Ghazālī's Epistemology*, pp. 118–19.

Criticism of Sufism centres on the very features that its adherents support. The focus on a privately accessed, esoteric mode of knowledge may appear to conflict with the call to a straightforward universal creed that for some is the *raison d'être* of Islam. Moreover, the idea of submission to the spiritual *shaykh* may be held to undermine the emphasis on personal epistemic autonomy that is an important theme within the rational theological tradition. A possible resolution to this tension could involve staking out distinct areas in which the various kinds of epistemic discourses operate.

With this broad outline in place, we shall shift attention to the contemporary Western tradition of religious epistemology and survey its own history and categories as a starting point for the specific analytic Islamic epistemological questions that we shall seek to raise in this book.

The Development of Religious Epistemology in the Contemporary Western Tradition

The approach taken within this volume to situate Islamic epistemology within contemporary Western religious epistemology is not necessarily an obvious or natural move, given the internal development of that discourse. For a start, this latter tradition is dominated by the Christian philosophers who are the architects of the field as we know it today – a fact that looks likely to remain. This raises a challenge for any religious tradition outside Christianity to find welcoming points of entry. Another reason is that there has been little to no engagement with Islamic epistemology (or logic, metaphysics, ethics and politics, for that matter) from other religious traditions and *vice versa*. Moreover, there has even been a relatively sparse development of Islamic epistemology as a field of inquiry on its own terms. This is suggested by the lack of substantive research monographs published in either English or any European language furthering the field.

To outline how the present volume applies ideas of Western religious epistemology to Islamic debates and intervenes in the ongoing development of the former field, it is useful to provide a brief survey of this complex domain. This task requires us to examine the following core ideas as they developed within the Western tradition: Enlightenment Evidentialism, Natural Theology, Wittgensteinian Fideism and, finally, Reformed Epistemology. Simply put, the latter three epistemological ideas can be seen as responses to the first: religious epistemology today in a sense is an ongoing debate about whether evidentialism applies to religious belief. Each of the three responses above has a distinct perspective on the nature of religious belief and its justification. Hence, through interaction with each other, these ideas shaped much of the discussions of twentieth-century Anglo-American (analytic) religious epistemology that form the

broad context and point of departure for an assessment of the relation between knowledge, faith and reason within philosophy of religion in the twenty-first century.

Enlightenment Evidentialism embodies a philosophical ethos that emerged from the intellectual ferment of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. This approach to the systematisation of knowledge and belief is deeply rooted in the works of pivotal thinkers such as David Hume, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant. It emphasises a rigorous grounding in reason as the cornerstone of any belief system. The central tenet of Enlightenment Evidentialism is the consistent application of reason to all beliefs. Kant's imperative 'Dare to know!' (*sapere aude*), which can be more loosely rendered as 'Have the courage to use your own understanding', encapsulates this ethos, advocating for autonomy in reasoning and scepticism about received wisdom. This philosophical stance challenges the legitimacy of beliefs based on tradition, authority, or mere sentiment, insisting instead that all beliefs must withstand the scrutiny of reason. At its core is the following claim:

$J(b) \Leftrightarrow E(b)$: 'a belief in b is justified if and only if there is evidence supporting the belief in b '.³²

A classic representation of Enlightenment Evidentialism is W. K. Clifford's essay titled 'The Ethics of Belief'; it further cemented the evidentialist framework by asserting that it is morally wrong to hold beliefs based on insufficient evidence. Clifford used a pair of narratives to illustrate this principle:

(1) The Ship Owner: Clifford narrates about a ship owner who, despite having strong evidence that his ship needed repairs, chose to believe otherwise. The ship's subsequent fate (sinking or surviving) was irrelevant to the ethical breach, which lay in believing against the weight of evidence. This story underscores the principle that belief should align strictly with the evidence available. (2) The Slanderers: in another example, a group's baseless belief in the guilt of individuals, despite readily available exculpatory evidence, illustrates the moral failings of evidential neglect. Even though the accused were eventually found guilty based on deeper investigation, the initial belief was formed unethically.³³

These narratives highlight a foundational concept in Enlightenment Evidentialism: the ethical dimension of belief wherein one has an obligation to form beliefs based on adequate and appropriate evidence. This extends

32 McCain, 'Evidence and Religious Belief', pp. 29–40.

33 Clifford, 'The Ethics of Belief', pp. 163–67; Aikin, *Evidentialism and the Will to Believe*, pp. 37–50.

beyond personal ethics into the social realm, as beliefs influence actions that affect societal well-being.

Enlightenment Evidentialism critically assesses religious beliefs through this stringent evidential lens. A contention arises particularly around the belief in God, deemed unreasonable under this framework if not supported by conclusive evidence. This view shaped the evidentialist critique of religious belief as often lacking sufficient empirical or rational justification. The Evidentialist Objection to Religious Belief (in God) can be set out in the following argument:³⁴

- P1. Belief in God is rational only if there is sufficient evidence for God's existence.
- P2. There is not sufficient evidence for God's existence.
- C1. Therefore, belief in God is irrational.

This formalisation encapsulates the evidentialist challenge to theism given the concurrent emergence of a critical assessment of the arguments traditionally used to justify belief in God, such as the ontological, cosmological and teleological. Notably, thinkers such as Hume and Kant critiqued these argument types for claimed logical and empirical shortcomings. The result of this challenge arguably led in various degrees to the growth of varieties of scepticism, agnosticism and atheism, as well as forcing theists to reconfigure their relationship to evidence in religious epistemology. Hence, in response to the challenges posed by Enlightenment Evidentialism, defenders of the rationality of religious belief developed several counter-arguments, which can be classified based on which premise of the Evidentialist Objection they reject:

- Rejection of Premise 1: some argue that religious belief does not strictly require empirical evidence, suggesting that other forms of knowledge and experience might justify such beliefs.
- Rejection of Premise 2: others contend that the evidence considered insufficient by critics is, in fact, adequate, citing experiences, miracles and the success of various arguments for God as indirect but compelling evidence of divine existence.

The second important idea is Natural Theology, which represents a unique interface between the strictures of Enlightenment Evidentialism and the realm of religion, particularly in its shared insistence on the necessity of evidence for theistic belief. In effect, Natural Theology adopts the

34 Taken from Clark, 'Religious Epistemology'.

evidentialist methodology but arrives at significantly different conclusions about fundamental religious beliefs, such as the existence of God, thereby challenging a stance that tends to favour scepticism regarding theological claims. Natural Theology concurs with the fundamental principles of Enlightenment Evidentialism, which dictates that beliefs must be substantiated by reason and empirical evidence. This agreement is reflected in the commitment of natural theologians to the first premise of the evidentialist objection to God: that rational belief in God requires evidential support. However, natural theology diverges in its interpretation and application of what constitutes 'sufficient evidence', particularly in relation to divine existence. This means that natural theologians dispute the second premise of the evidentialist objection, which posits the insufficiency of evidence for God's existence. Instead, they argue that the available evidence not only supports theism but that it does so convincingly. This stance is manifested through several classical arguments that have been foundational to Natural Theology in the Western tradition such as the ontological, cosmological, teleological, axiological and historical-experiential arguments. These arguments are seen by natural theologians as fulfilling the evidential requirement laid out by Enlightenment Evidentialism and as addressing both the empirical and rational dimensions of evidence.³⁵

Natural theologians today have not remained static in their defences but have actively re-articulated and strengthened their earlier arguments in response to criticisms from evidentialist and other philosophical quarters. This dynamic engagement underscores their commitment to the evidentialist demand for robust, logically coherent and empirically supported arguments. They aim not only to counteract atheistic interpretations of the same evidence but also to demonstrate that theism can be a rationally held position based on the available evidence.³⁶ The approach of Natural Theology illustrates a critical engagement with Enlightenment principles, adapting its rigorous demands for evidence to support metaphysical and supernatural claims. This adaptation shows that the debate between sceptical evidentialists and natural theologians is fundamentally about the interpretation and sufficiency of evidence rather than methodology *per se*. Natural theologians assert that the evidence not only allows for belief in God but, when properly understood, actively supports such belief. Thus, Natural Theology, in its dialogue with Enlightenment Evidentialism, highlights a vital aspect of contemporary religious epistemology: that evidential demands can be met in the context of religious belief, albeit through

35 See Baker-Hytch, 'Natural Theology', pp. 13–28.

36 See the articles in Craig and Moreland (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*; Manning (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology*; and Ruloff and Horban (eds), *Contemporary Arguments in Natural Theology*.

complex philosophical arguments. Natural Theology has thus contributed to the development of contemporary religious epistemology by opening epistemic space for theistic beliefs and showing that they can emerge intact from the demands of sceptical evidentialism.

Next in line for analysis is Wittgensteinian Fideism, a stance that provides a stark contrast to Enlightenment Evidentialism and its derivatives. This philosophical stance, influenced heavily by Ludwig Wittgenstein's theories of language and meaning, approaches religious language and belief through a lens that diverges significantly from the empirical and rational criteria emphasised by evidentialism.³⁷ Wittgenstein's 'language games' theory posits that meaning in language arises from its use within specific life contexts or 'forms of life'. Each form of life has its own rules that govern the meaning and use of language, which are not universally applicable but context-dependent.³⁸ This perspective fundamentally challenged the Logical Positivists' assertion that language must be either analytically true/false or empirically verifiable to be meaningful.³⁹ Enlightenment Evidentialism, as discussed, insists on complete empirical or logical justification for beliefs. Wittgensteinian Fideism diverges from this by asserting that religious beliefs are part of a distinct language game with its own internal logic and criteria for meaning and truth. This approach suggests that the criteria set by evidentialism are not only inappropriate but irrelevant for assessing religious beliefs, which are deeply embedded in non-empirical, normative and existential dimensions of human life. Key aspects of Wittgensteinian Fideism include, firstly, that religious language is autonomous and governed by its own rules within a religious form of life. This insulates religious beliefs from external epistemological critiques that do not share the same foundational assumptions. Secondly, fideism holds that religious language does not compete with scientific or empirical language because they operate in fundamentally different domains. Religious statements are not deficient versions of empirical claims but operate under a different logic that does not conform to empirical verification. Thirdly, religious language is primarily expressive and participative, reflecting and reinforcing the communal practices and shared beliefs of a religious community. Understanding and engaging with religious language thus requires participation in its specific form of life.⁴⁰

37 It is debatable whether the position referred to as 'Wittgensteinian Fideism' (first coined by Kai Nielsen in 1967) with its subsequent characterisation and application to discussions around religious belief and religious language is what Wittgenstein himself would have endorsed. See Amesbury, 'Fideism', and Carroll, *Wittgenstein within the Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 101–22.

38 Kishik, *Wittgenstein's Form of Life*.

39 Creath, 'Logical Positivism'.

40 Amesbury, 'Fideism'; Forrest, 'The Epistemology of Religion'.

While Natural Theology attempts to engage with evidentialist demands by providing rational and empirical support for religious beliefs (thus accepting the evidentialist premise that belief in God requires evidence), Wittgensteinian Fideism rejects this premise outright. It argues that the criteria for meaningful and justified belief in a religious context are not susceptible to the same standards used in natural science or empirical inquiry. An implication of this, of course, is that it introduces a relativistic element to religious epistemology, suggesting that what counts as a justified belief is relative to the language game one is playing. The stance challenges the universal applicability of Enlightenment Evidentialism, proposing instead that different domains of human experience (such as religion) may legitimately operate according to their own epistemological standards. This not only broadens the scope of what can be considered rational but also emphasises the diversity of human cognitive and cultural practices. Wittgensteinian Fideism therefore provided a critique of sorts, as well as an alternative to Enlightenment Evidentialism, by redefining the boundaries of meaningful and justified belief. It shifted the focus from universal evidential standards to the contextual, rule-governed practices of language games. In doing so, it offered a way to view religious beliefs as deeply rational within their own contexts, even if they do not conform to the strict empirical standards set by evidentialism. This perspective fostered a more inclusive and pluralistic understanding of knowledge and belief, recognising the legitimacy of diverse forms of life and the ways in which they shape human understanding.

The final idea to be examined is Reformed Epistemology, a stance that represents a sophisticated philosophical challenge to Enlightenment Evidentialism, specifically questioning the requirement that all beliefs, including belief in God, must be founded on argumentative and empirical evidence.⁴¹ Pioneered by the philosophers Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff and William Alston, Reformed Epistemology (also known as Proper Functionalism) argues against the classical foundationalist view that a non-inferential or 'properly basic' belief must be either rationally self-evident or evident to the senses and indubitable to be rationally accepted.⁴² This latter perspective,

41 Bergmann, 'Reformed Epistemology', pp. 41–55.

42 Reformed Epistemology emerged in the early 1980s, significantly shaped by both the Reformed theological tradition and developments within general epistemology. It was notably articulated in the collection *Faith and Rationality*, edited by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, both of whom drew inspiration from Reformed theologians such as John Calvin and Abraham Kuyper. Central to their argument is Plantinga's adoption of Calvin's idea that humans possess an innate *sensus divinitatis* or sense of the divine, which naturally inclines them toward theistic beliefs.

embedded in Enlightenment Evidentialism, is seen as too restrictive and not reflective of how humans actually form and justify their beliefs. Reformed Epistemology proposes to broaden the spectrum of basic beliefs to include those that are not necessarily supported by arguments or evidence but are still rationally held because they are foundational to human experience, such as beliefs about other minds, the external world and even God. Reformed Epistemology thus challenges the demarcation used by evidentialists between basic and non-basic beliefs, reclassifying the belief in God as properly basic and hence rational without inferential support.

One of the potent critiques made within Reformed Epistemology is that evidentialism, when applied consistently, undermines itself. If all beliefs must be supported by evidence, then the very rules of evidentialism would need justification by evidence, which cannot be adequately supplied. Moreover, the universal demand for evidence cannot be met consistently without falling into scepticism about many ordinary beliefs (such as beliefs about the past and other minds, and so on) that we typically take for granted. By demonstrating that these everyday beliefs would fail the evidentialist test, Reformed Epistemology seeks to reveal an inconsistency in the evidentialist framework, arguing that it is self-defeating and untenable as a universal standard.

When proponents of Reformed Epistemology advocate that belief in God does not require evidential justification, they argue for the propriety of these beliefs based on their functionality within a person's noetic structure – the interconnected web of a person's beliefs. This approach leans towards an externalist view of epistemology, where the justification of a belief hinges more on the reliability of the process through which the belief is formed, rather than on evidential support accessible to introspection.⁴³ The shift towards externalism in Reformed Epistemology highlights the importance of the conditions under which beliefs are formed.

This perspective challenges the necessity of evidential support for theistic belief, positing instead that such beliefs can be properly basic and justified independently of empirical evidence. While its foundational ideas resonate with Reformed theology, Reformed Epistemology's principles are adaptable across various Christian traditions and potentially other monotheistic religions, suggesting a broader applicability than its Christian origins might imply. Additionally, influences from epistemologists such as Thomas Reid, who emphasised the role of innate belief-forming faculties, have also been pivotal. Reid argued that some belief dispositions are inherent and, while they cannot be entirely justified through rational processes, they are nonetheless crucial for understanding the rationality of religious beliefs. This blend of theological insights and epistemological theories underpinning Reformed Epistemology mark it as a distinct approach that views religious beliefs as rational and rooted in the specific cognitive dispositions with which humans are endowed. See Bolos and Scott, 'Reformed Epistemology'.

43 McNabb, *Religious Epistemology*, pp. 1–3.

If a belief is produced under conditions that are generally reliable, then the belief can be considered justified. This marks a significant departure from the internalist approaches typical of evidentialism, which focus on the justifiability of beliefs based on evidence perceptible or intelligible to the believer.

Reformed Epistemology, then, provides its own robust alternative to Enlightenment Evidentialism by challenging its foundational premises and proposing a more permissive framework for understanding what it means for a belief to be justified. By expanding the scope of what counts as a basic belief and critiquing the self-defeating nature of strict evidentialist criteria, this approach arguably offers a distinctive way to reconcile rational belief in God with a rigorous epistemological framework. This has not only enriched the philosophical discourse around belief and justification but has also reassured those holding religious beliefs that their faith need not be at odds with rationality.

Building on the above categories, we shall now introduce a more fine-grained epistemological classification for questions surrounding the justification of belief, which is the volume's central motif. By mapping the positions of certain key Islamic schools and figures in analytic terms, we shall begin to establish the specific intellectual contexts in which the contributions to this volume make their interventions.

Justification of Beliefs between Analytic Epistemology and Islamic Theology

In bridging the discourses of analytic epistemology and Islamic theology, it is useful to focus on a specific theme. The one that best fits the present exercise is that of justification: what must be connected to empirical beliefs, such as those asserted within Islamic theology, for them to be justified.⁴⁴ Next, for any Islamic perspective to engage prevailing contemporary discussions in religious epistemology, there must be mutual intelligibility between parties. In order to establish this, it is important to define precisely the terms of the engagement. For the sake of framing

44 The beliefs important for Islamic thought, most significantly the existence of God and the messengerhood of the Prophet Muhammad (and those beliefs derived from them), are usually understood as what are termed empirical beliefs in contemporary epistemology. That is, their warrant is derived from premises drawn from experience and not reason or inspiration alone. See BonJour, 'A Version of Internalist Foundationalism', pp. 5–6. This does not necessarily imply that the beliefs in question are initially formed based on arguments, although there may be areas in which theoretical investigations of branch matters (*furū*) explicate what should be believed. See Frank, 'The Science of *Kalām*', 232.

the following treatment of the Islamic tradition, we shall draw some common distinctions from contemporary epistemology with the following questions:⁴⁵

1. To what extent does the justification of empirical beliefs require internal access to relevant evidence?
2. To what extent does the justification of empirical beliefs require individual access to evidence?
3. What is the noetic structure by which the justification of beliefs is arranged?
4. What kinds of beliefs count as non-inferential, and what is their justificatory strength?

Question (1) concerns the debate between positions termed externalism and internalism. A basic shared presumption is that every justified true belief requires a secure link to its object of knowledge. For example, for the belief that God exists to be justified and true, the concept of God must connect to the deity's actual existence.⁴⁶ Externalism can be understood as the position that this link to the object of knowledge is not just necessary but sufficient for warrant. The most famous example is the Proper Functionalism (or Reformed Epistemology) articulated by Alvin Plantinga, in which the belief that God exists is warranted even in the absence of any access to evidence due to the faculties with which the human being has been endowed.⁴⁷ An externalist in this sense will not necessarily think that human beings lack internal access to evidence, just that they need not. Internalism is the position that warrant also requires complete access, in principle, to all relevant evidence by epistemic agents.

Classical-era theologians from the Sunnī *kalām* schools of the Ash'arīs and Māturīdīs, as well as the Mu'tazilīs (whose positions were adopted by many Shī'īs)⁴⁸ were invariably internalists. They understood religious beliefs, such as the existence of God, to receive justification from the evidence provided by rationally and scripturally based theological

45 This framework mainly reflects the individualistic emphasis of epistemology prior to its more recent 'social turn'. See O'Connor *et al.*, 'Social Epistemology'. Although it is necessary for Islamic theology to also reckon with this development, it should not be at the expense of addressing these basic questions.

46 There is a great deal that can be said about the definition and reference of the concept of God, as well as of existence. See Klima, 'The "Grammar" of "God" and "Being"'. There is also the post-Heidegger contention that such an 'ontotheological' understanding of God is, in effect, idolatrous. See Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, pp. 39–41.

47 McNabb, 'Proper Functionalism', pp. 108–9.

48 See, for instance, Abdulsater, *Shi'i Doctrine, Mu'tazili Theology*, p. 2.

arguments. Such arguments, with which they filled their treatises, were intended as reproducible by audiences to engender the warrant claimed by their authors. An example from the Ash'arī tradition is Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) who writes: 'Sound inquiry, when pursued with full effort, and in the absence of a deficiency alongside it, furnishes rational certainty in affirming knowledge of that which is inquired about'.⁴⁹ In the Māturīdī tradition, the example can be given of the Bukharan scholar Abū Ishāq al-Ṣaffār (d. 534/1139) who uses variants of the phrase 'the evidence that furnishes certainty' as the keynote to the epistemological introduction to his book.⁵⁰ Likewise, in the text ascribed to Mānkdim Shashdīw (d. 425/1034), a notable Mu'tazilī Zaydī theologian, there is mention of 'inquiry into evidences to arrive by them to knowledge'.⁵¹ Anthony Booth has argued that in the case of the Mu'tazila (and with the caveat expressed in (2) below, the same is true for the other *kalām* schools) this amounts to evidentialism: 'a subject *S*'s belief that *p* is justified iff *S* has sufficient evidence that *p*'.⁵² For those Muslim scholars today who continue to work within the rational legacy bequeathed by the mainstream classical and postclassical *kalām* discourse, a strong commitment to internalism remains central to their stance. This is the case even if the nature of that evidence can in some circumstances be 'pared down' to the reception of mass-transmitted reports of the Prophet Muḥammad and his miracles (along with sufficient rational argumentation to establish their evidentiary force), as discussed by Aaron Spevack in his chapter in this volume.

Externalist theorists are much thinner on the ground, albeit not entirely absent.⁵³ For instance, it has been argued that the Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) is an externalist (of the Plantingian proper functionalist kind), because he holds that the human being has been created with a natural disposition (*fiṭra*)⁵⁴ which triggers warranted belief in God in the presence of divine 'signs' in the world without the need to reason from

49 Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Irshād*, p. 61. Al-Juwaynī is a central figure in the chapters by Hannah Erlwein and Laura Hassan in Part II of this volume.

50 Al-Ṣaffār, *Talkhīṣ al-adilla*, vol. 1, pp. 28–38.

51 Al-Hamadhānī, *Sharh al-uṣūl al-khamsa*, p. 45. Note that this text was published under the name of 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī (d. 415/1025), the author of the commentary on which it is the *ta'liq* (supercommentary).

52 Booth, *Analytic Islamic Philosophy*, p. 9. This is equivalent to the formulation in the previous section.

53 The qualification 'theorists' is important as it could be argued that members of the notable and widespread tendency of non-*kalām* Traditionalism implicitly adopt an externalist position.

54 On Ibn Taymiyya's treatment of the *fiṭra*, see El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation*, pp. 260–64.

evidence.⁵⁵ Another externalist who appears in this volume is the modern Shīʿī theologian Mīrzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī (d. 1365/1946) who, as discussed by Amir Mohammad Emami, independently developed a model remarkably similar to that of Ibn Taymiyya. The debate over the ‘basicity’ of Islamic belief and how that plays out against parallel Christian claims has been a vibrant area of recent discussion, as can be seen in Part IV of this book.

Question (2) is only a consideration for internalists: the distinction between individual *versus* communal access to evidence is arguably only significant when it is granted that internal access is needed in the first place. On this question, we can distinguish between ‘strong’ evidentialism that requires every individual to possess internal justificatory evidence and Sensible Evidentialism that only needs there to be an appropriate relationship of community between the individual and others who do possess it.⁵⁶ For example, in this view, a person’s belief in the existence of astronomical black holes may be warranted without possessing any evidence, as long as they can in principle reliably consult the work of relevant experts.⁵⁷

In *kalām*, these ideas relate to the well-known divergence in opinion over ‘following traditional authority in the matter of belief’ (*al-taqlīd fī al-īmān*). In general, whereas the Muʿtazila and some of the Ashʿarī school required individual possession of evidence for the validation of faith, other Ashʿarīs and the Māturīdīs validated the belief of the common believer who lacks this evidence when it was possessed by scholars.⁵⁸ In this case, the evidence possessed by such experts acts as an internalist warrant for the common people. Nevertheless, both approaches were castigated on grounds of elitism by Ibn Taymiyya.⁵⁹

55 Turner, ‘An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology’, pp. 775–83. Turner’s account is developed and defended in his chapter in Part IV of this volume. Safaruk Chowdhury, while noting the similarities between Ibn Taymiyya’s epistemology and Plantinga’s Proper Functionalism, has argued for the distinctiveness of the former’s approach, especially in terms of his presuppositionalism. See Chowdhury, ‘Ibn Taymiyya’s Fīṭralism and Alvin Plantinga’s Reformed Epistemology: A Comparison and Analysis’.

56 Wykstra, ‘Externalism, Proper Inferentiality and Sensible Evidentialism’, p. 110. Here there may be questions asked about how such a relation should be specified. If the connection is too weak – for example, if it was to co-religionists who live in another country and do not speak the same language – it seems that there may not be a significant difference from externalism.

57 We may want to stipulate that, even in Sensible Evidentialism, part of what it is to believe in astronomical black holes is to know, even in a vague way, that knowledge about them emerges from the scientific community. But this would not seem to be a requirement, so long as the person possessing such a belief can in principle trace it back to scientists who possess evidence for it, as opposed to belief in a daily horoscope, for instance.

58 Al-Bazdawī, ‘Uṣūl al-dīn’, pp. 152–53; al-Juwaynī, *Al-Irshād*, pp. 57, 64. For further discussion of various nuanced later positions, see Spevack, ‘Continuing Conversations’, and El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 173–214.

59 Anjum, *Politics, Law, and Community in Islamic Thought*, pp. 214–19.

Question (3) looks at the justificatory structure between beliefs. Foundationalism, in the debate over epistemological justification,⁶⁰ asserts that at least some beliefs held by an epistemic agent are non-inferential, such that they are not arrived at by virtue of inference from, or in their relation to, other beliefs. They are thus termed basic beliefs. In contemporary discussion (albeit not necessarily in premodern thought), any beliefs that are held on *a priori* grounds – for instance, that the Law of Non-Contradiction (LNC) is true – are often excluded from consideration. The debate turns, therefore, on empirical beliefs arising from perception of the world in some way. A long-standing motivation for foundationalism is a regress argument that justification becomes impossible if it does not reach back to individual beliefs that are not justified by other beliefs.⁶¹ They are taken, therefore, as furnishing the human being with basic knowledge on which further reasoning can be securely grounded. This argument, however, leads to a strong case that foundationalism is only viable if basic beliefs have a certain minimum amount of independent ‘justificatory strength’ – see (4), below.

The main alternative to foundationalism in terms of noetic structure is coherentism, a theory in which the warrant of beliefs is derived from their place within a larger system that is collectively justified. Instead of granting any individual belief a self-justifying status, coherentism is committed to the idea that justification always requires the coherence of that belief with others.⁶²

Foundationalism and coherentism can both be applied in principle to internalism and externalism. In the former case, this is unproblematic: the varieties of internalism and externalism discussed under (1) are paradigmatically foundationalist. A problem arises in the latter case, however. It would seem that, for coherentism to be meaningful, an epistemic agent would need cognitive access to the evidence that a given belief coheres with their existing system of beliefs. Externalism thus may appear to undercut the motivation for coherentism, which is premised not on the basicity of beliefs, but on the good fit between them.⁶³ Hence, arguably the best

60 An important theme in contemporary philosophy is whether there are basic grounding truths or realities to be discovered by the investigation of knowledge claims. Foundationalism about truth is the position that such grounds do exist and should be distinguished from the separate question, discussed here, of whether and to what extent a foundationalist structure is necessary for epistemic justification. Despite some debate over the matter, it seems plausible that the former position is core to the viable ongoing activity of philosophy; see Cahoon, *The Ends of Philosophy*, pp. 42–44. Moreover, such a stance is a minimal commitment for the kinds of questions in conversation with the Islamic tradition addressed in this book.

61 See Hasan and Fumerton, ‘Foundationalist Theories of Epistemic Justification’.

62 See Elgin, ‘Non-Foundationalist Epistemology’, pp. 244–46.

63 Bonjour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, pp. 101–2.

versions of coherentism propose that beliefs receive justification from their ongoing place within an epistemic structure on the basis of evidence.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, every major epistemological theory within the Islamic theological tradition has been foundationalist if that label is interpreted in the above minimal terms, and none of the contributors to the present volume attempts here to advance a coherentist alternative.⁶⁵

Question (4) considers the nature and ‘justificatory strength’ of the non-inferential, or basic, beliefs that are held to exist under different versions of foundationalism, as defined in (3). The dominant *kalām* approach is what can be called a variety of traditional foundationalism. This takes basic beliefs to either be furnished by one’s external senses or one’s reason in the form of immediate, or necessary, knowledge.⁶⁶ There is also an important third category of testimonial knowledge, under which come the beliefs that arise through engagement with scripture and ultimately prophetic revelation. This is sometimes understood to be the product of inference (*muktasab*) in its entirety, although when it is the product of mass transmission (*tawātur*), it is often held to be non-inferential (*ḍarūrī*).⁶⁷ Prophetic revelation, which is vouchsafed as an epistemic source through the public performance of miracles, is near universally accepted within Islamic thought. The Sufi claim to special religious knowledge through spiritual inspiration (*ilhām*) or mystical unveiling (*kashf*) is treated more ambivalently. Some currents of thought take this as a supra-rational source that can trump the limited capacities of human reason. Others, even if they do not deny the possibility of this mode of knowledge outright, argue that it is not suitable for the kind of religious knowledge with binding social implications which is the primary subject of debate.⁶⁸

64 The invocation of evidence for a coherentist theory may appear strange, as one of the most famous objections to it, the ‘isolation objection’, invokes the idea of it being a self-consistent structure without reference to the outside world. See Olsson, ‘Coherentist Theories of Epistemic Justification’. But arguably, in any plausible coherentist view, experiential feedback maintains reliable beliefs.

65 For a recent attempt to put forward a model of coherentism, which is compatible with, albeit not exclusive to, Islamic thought, see Harvey, ‘Lifeworld Coherentism and Tradition-Based Perspectivalism’.

66 Houtenga, *Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga*, pp. 181–82.

67 Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-aqīda al-Nasafiyya*, pp. 21–22. See Zysow, *The Economy of Certainty*, pp. 13–17. It is important to bear in mind that what is in question is the justificatory dependence of these testimonial beliefs on the warrant-giving power of sense and reason-derived beliefs, not the fact that any testimony requires certain sensory and rational preconditions. For a detailed study of the Islamic concept of mass transmission, see Laher, *Tawātur in Islamic Thought*.

68 See Harvey, ‘Islamic Theology and the Crisis of Contemporary Science’, pp. 408–10, 417–18, nn. 42–43.

The model of traditional foundationalism can be termed a ‘strong’ foundationalism insofar as the senses and reason (in the normal case that they are not impaired) form beliefs that are individually incorrigible: suitable not merely for warrant, but for certain justification.⁶⁹ If one were to reduce the justificatory strength of the basic beliefs so that each still individually provides justification, yet not incorrigibly, then this would be a form of moderate foundationalism.⁷⁰ If their justificatory strength was to drop yet further, such that multiple basic beliefs were required together to reach warrant, this would be weak foundationalism, which in requiring other non-inferential beliefs for justification begins to come close to a kind of coherentism.⁷¹

As with (3), there seems little point in listing schools of thought within Islamic theology for (4) because, again, a single perspective dominated: strong foundationalism. Nevertheless, some scholars did diverge from this model in interesting ways. In the next section, we shall present the ideas of the major early theologian Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī as an example of such an alternative approach.

Case-Study: Al-Māturīdī and the Basicity of Tradition

Al-Māturīdī has a distinguished historical status in Islamic theological discourse. His theological summa, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, is acknowledged as the earliest such text extant.⁷² Even more significant in the present context is that he begins his book with sustained original epistemological theorising, setting a very influential precedent for Sunnī frameworks, especially the tradition bearing his name.⁷³ The present case-study, then, provides a fitting focused introduction into early Muslim epistemological thought, marking a point of departure for the themes tackled in this volume. Moreover, his model occupies an interesting place within the broader matrix of Islamic religious epistemology, staking out a distinctive position that otherwise would not be covered by the set of chapters that we have collected.

69 BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, pp. 26–27.

70 BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, pp. 21–22.

71 This position is not coherentism because it maintains a two-tier distinction in which inferential beliefs can receive their warrant from basic beliefs, but not vice versa. But given that, like coherentism, it holds that warrant can only be derived based on the relationship between beliefs (since basic beliefs are too weak on their own), there is arguably little reason to continue to maintain the two-tier distinction. After all, this distinction was initially premised on the idea that there was a difference-making ‘self-justicatory strength’ to basic beliefs.

72 Van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*, Volume 4, p. 805.

73 Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, pp. 74–79.

The initial introduction to *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* explores how to find truth among various religions and sects, as well as the necessity of an interplay between tradition and reason to achieve this. It is followed by a treatment of valid and invalid epistemological sources in which al-Māturīdī settles on a tripartite means to the kind of publicly verifiable knowledge addressed by *kalām* in terms of perception, reports and rational inquiry. At the same time, he rules out a number of purported sources for use in debate between the above-mentioned groups.⁷⁴ Significantly, he rejects spiritual inspiration (*ilhām*) for this function, though not in absolute terms.⁷⁵ His discussion of the acceptable sources for epistemology are astute and proved extremely influential on the *kalām* manuals and creedal texts that followed within Sunnism (the ‘three source’ scheme became so pervasive that we have chosen to use it to structure Part II of this volume). Going beyond al-Māturīdī’s legacy as school eponym, the question arises as to whether his own epistemological system is identical to that adopted by later Māturīdis. The argument we shall pursue is that, according to the reconstruction presented here, certain differences can be observed in his *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* that provide a contrast to the dominant strong foundationalism of *kalām* due to his approach to the basicality of tradition.

With respect to question (1), al-Māturīdī’s epistemology is in the same family of evidentialism as discussed above. He affirms internalism, writing that the need for the truth amid competing religious beliefs is warranted *via* ‘rational proof by which the truthfulness of [a given authority’s] claims is known (*ḥujjat ‘aql yu‘lamu [bi-hā] ṣidquhu fī-mā yudda‘ā*)’.⁷⁶ The situation is more complex for (2). His discussion in this opening section of his book shows an awareness of the social dynamics of knowledge and implies that he thinks uncritical following (*taqlīd*) among the masses is, in general, unavoidable.⁷⁷ He acknowledges that each group has ‘predecessors who are followed (*kullan minhum lahu salaf yuqallad*)’.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, he remarks that such following is not sufficient by itself, as one’s opponents in religion are able to draw on their own authorities and ‘everyone should

74 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, pp. 65–74. For an overall characterisation of the approach, see Rudolph, ‘Ratio und Überlieferung in der Erkenntnislehre al-Ash‘arī’s und al-Māturīdī’s’, pp. 79–84. For more on these sources, see Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, pp. 91–101; Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, pp. 19–27.

75 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 69. See Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, pp. 19–20.

76 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 66.

77 This aligns with the social context of Samarqand in the tenth century. The general language of speech and administration was Persian; Arabic, in which Islamic scholarly works were written, was only understood by an intellectual elite. See Frye, ‘The Sāmānids’, p. 146.

78 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 65.

know the reality about the religion that he adopts (*wa-ʿalā kull wāḥid minhum maʿrifat al-ḥaqq fī-mā yadīnu huwa bihi*).⁷⁹ How can these two aspects be reconciled? It seems that what al-Māturīdī is pointing towards is that the problem of religious disagreement only emerges if there is no proper link between the uncritical follower's belief and the religious authority who possesses proof able to vindicate that belief against its rivals.⁸⁰ He thinks, however, that membership of the tradition itself provides such a link as well as various other tools needed for the proper exercise of one's individual epistemic capacities.⁸¹ This position of Sensible Evidentialism leaves the full internalist rational justification of the truth a task for specialists.⁸² Even though suitable evidence must be ultimately available upon encountering a rival with conflicting beliefs, the full process of evidential inference is not a requirement for each member of the community.⁸³ This position balances the evidentialist presumption that warrant requires evidential vindication with a degree of pragmatism in applying this idea to large populations of believers who lack the training to engage in sophisticated *kalām* argumentation.

So far, this kind of internalist and Sensible Evidentialist position is fairly standard within the Māturīdī and some aspects of the Ashʿarī *kalām* tradition. Where then is its distinctiveness located? It is not his response to (3), which we have characterised as a minimal commitment to a foundationalist structure of justification. Al-Māturīdī straightforwardly holds that the unimpaired senses, for example, justify certain relevant beliefs,⁸⁴ and there is no suggestion that he is a coherentist. The difference, therefore, comes in response to (4), with his idea of tradition (*samʿ*) as an unavoidable non-inferential and corrigible source of beliefs within one's epistemic structure.⁸⁵

Before crystallising what such a position amounts to in contemporary epistemological terms, it is useful to provide some further textual support. Al-Māturīdī uses the term *samʿ* in at least three ways. First, tradition in the

79 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 65.

80 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 66. This may refer to a prophet, and specifically the Prophet Muhammad, although this is not specified in the body of the text itself.

81 For further reflection on this point, see John Greco's characterisation of 'vulnerable' epistemic dependency in his chapter within this volume.

82 Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, pp. 16–17.

83 See al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-adilla*, vol. 1, p. 25.

84 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, pp. 70, 223.

85 In a previous work, Ramon Harvey has written of al-Māturīdī's 'non-foundationalism'. The intent of this expression, as can be seen from the content and context of its deployment, was that al-Māturīdī's 'tradition basicism' (see below) is distinct from standard *kalām* strong foundationalism. See Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, pp. 12, 16, 20, 28. The present treatment, then, is a clarification and development of this prior point, not a repudiation of it.

sense of knowledge conveyed through one's social situatedness is a backdrop to the intellectual lives of human beings. Although reason remains crucial for evidentially settling the debates between religions, its exercise always takes place within one's particular grounding in tradition in this general sense. Thus, he writes:

As for tradition, there is no avoiding the human being taking it as a way [or a school of thought] (*madhhab*), relying upon it and calling others to it, so that sophists share that with those who profess the existence of things and verify their reality. On this basis proceed the politics of worldly kings who all conduct themselves according to their mutual competition in seeking settlement of their affairs based on it and uniting the hearts of their subjects with it. The same is true for the person who calls to the prophetic message and to wisdom, as well as the person who organises the different kinds of professions.⁸⁶

This statement shows that al-Māturīdī sees tradition as an ineliminable part of human life and that including it within his epistemology is just to treat that life in a realistic way. One always works from within a framework of thought that is informed by the ideas of one's forbears, whether that means the reuse of the famous arguments of epistemological sceptics or the rebuttals of their opponents. If this is the case, however, then arguably one does not solely seek warrant for one's beliefs through chains of inference grounded in self-evident beliefs but advances rational justification within the epistemic context of the understandings and practices of tradition as such.⁸⁷

When moving beyond these theoretical considerations at the start of his book, al-Māturīdī explicitly invokes tradition to provide warrant to his positions. Here, he uses it in a sense somewhat narrowed from the earlier conception, in which he appeals to rightly guided tradition that ultimately has a divine source, albeit not exclusively within the dispensation revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad. For instance, the first indication that he supplies to justify the belief that the originator of the world is one, and not more, is tradition. He writes: 'As for tradition, [the indication] is the agreement of doctrine [that is, by religions and sects] – despite their differences – on the One'.⁸⁸ In other words, monotheism is such a shared point

86 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, pp. 66–67.

87 Hence, for example, al-Māturīdī holds the singularly narrated report (*khābar al-wāḥid*) to be apparent (*ẓāhir*) and to thereby gain acceptability 'within the tradition in which it is encompassed' (*fī al-sam' alladhī qad uḥīṭa*); al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 72.

88 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 85. Al-Māturīdī's use of the term 'the One (*al-wāḥid*)' for God reflects his acknowledgement of the Neoplatonic *falāsifa* as important interlocutors who nevertheless are united on this point (in name, if not in theological interpretation).

of tradition that its justification is not even needed in many discursive contexts. In a similar way, al-Māturīdī argues that tradition, taken in a sense to include what has come directly from God, as well as ‘those who [God] has allowed to be followed’, does not affirm calling God a body.⁸⁹ Again, when beginning to discuss the divine attributes, he provides a tradition-based justification for the attribution and naming of God with active participles, such as powerful (*qādir*) and knowing (*‘ālim*). He writes: ‘Tradition is what is brought by the Qur’an and the rest of God’s Books, and [God] is named by what was mentioned by the messengers and all of the creation, except a people who applied these names to other than Him, thinking that affirming the name was to make a likeness between him and every named thing’.⁹⁰ Here tradition is still understood broadly: not just as the content of the Qur’an, but of all revealed scripture; and, by implication, not just the words of the messengers, but their followers. When discussing the creation and natures of things, al-Māturīdī says: ‘One must resort to tradition. In this, the reports of the People of Monotheism are the most reliable source of knowledge because they have veracious proofs’.⁹¹ Despite favouring the reports of his own group, it is clear that tradition is a wider category than solely the Islamic revelation. Also, when discussing if judgement can be suspended on whether divine speech is a creation or not, al-Māturīdī comments: ‘This is far from the truth on account of there being no escape from travelling on a path of traditional authority (*madhhab al-taqlīd*) and most of the people reject that [suspension of judgement]’.⁹² Finally, there are places, especially in the chapters in *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* on human action, major sins and belief – parts that reflect al-Māturīdī’s presentation of the ‘older’ Ḥanafī theological legacy⁹³ – in which tradition refers specifically to evidence from the Qur’an, Sunna and common Muslim understanding.⁹⁴

At this juncture it is necessary to clarify the epistemic status of revelation transmitted as tradition, especially when that is done through mass-transmitted (*mutawātir*) testimony, as is the case for the Qur’an. This aspect of tradition is considered by al-Māturīdī to be certain, since it comes from a certainly reliable witness (the Prophet Muḥammad) and *via* so many subsequent narrators that it is inconceivable that they could

89 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 103.

90 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 108. This seems to be a subtle criticism of Neoplatonic philosophy, as adopted by the Ismāʿīlīs, which applied the divine names to the First Intellect. He is elsewhere open in criticising ‘the Bāṭinīs’ in these terms (pp. 161–63). Also see De Smet, ‘Ismāʿīlī Theology’, p. 317.

91 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 219.

92 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 122.

93 See Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*, pp. 216–17.

94 See al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, pp. 302, 305–6, 315–16, 344–45 and 471.

collude on a lie.⁹⁵ Yet, from al-Māturīdī's treatment it is clear that he thinks the belief in the Qur'an's certainty as a source, and its subsequent use in theological arguments, is inferential. It relies on rational consideration of the proof for the Prophet's truthfulness, as well as reflection on the number of channels through which the text has been received. Therefore, there is an important distinction between the general non-inferential sense in which a Muslim may encounter a statement of the Qur'an as part of the background of tradition and the inferential sense in which it becomes, upon rational reflection, a mass-transmitted report (*khābar*) in the context of discursive argument.⁹⁶

What emerges from the first two of al-Māturīdī's three usages of the concept of tradition is a kind of meta-epistemological discourse that is distinct from his account of the nature and function of the three standard epistemological sources of perception, rational inquiry and reports (which includes his third usage). This kind of meta-theory can act to regulate justificatory activity within certain dialectical contexts by allowing appeal to tradition as a valuable, albeit corrigible, non-inferential epistemic source. It recognises, as does Sensible Evidentialism, that an inferential case for warrant, even one that relies on strong empirically and rationally grounded beliefs as premises, also makes use of general principles and inference methods that are not themselves included in those empirical or rational premises.⁹⁷

It is now possible to provide a more precise answer to (4) above according to al-Māturīdī's epistemology. The category of tradition must include a number of non-inferential beliefs within the epistemic agent's noetic structure. For al-Māturīdī, these 'traditional' beliefs join those arising from sense perception and reason as the basic sources from which one can derive inferential knowledge. But unlike these other two sources, the beliefs of tradition cannot be taken as certain. Rather, taken as a whole, they are open to revision. It is the very fact that they are so open that, according to al-Māturīdī's account, explains why differing traditions disagree on truth in the first place, given their presumably similar perceptual and rational faculties. This unavoidable basicity of tradition within al-Māturīdī's epistemology has the consequence of avoiding strong foundationalism. In moving from the immediate beliefs prompted by the senses and reason to infer other empirical beliefs, tradition always comes into play, whether explicitly invoked or not. Hence, the strong foundationalist strategy of ensuring incorrigible inputs, certain rational inference methods

95 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, pp. 71–72.

96 See Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, pp. 21–25.

97 See Wykstra, 'Externalism, Proper Inferentiality and Sensible Evidentialism', pp. 117–18.

(for instance, deduction), which then lead to demonstrably certain conclusions, is undercut.⁹⁸

To put al-Māturīdī's approach into a wider historical context, we can appreciate that the word he uses for tradition, *sam'* (literally, 'that which is heard'), recalls to some degree Aristotle's use of the term *doxa* for received opinion as the basis for dialectical, rather than demonstrative, syllogisms.⁹⁹ Al-Māturīdī is a dialectician *par excellence* and, like others from his era of *kalām*, is happy to agree with his interlocutor on an accepted premise in order to advance justificatory arguments for his beliefs, a procedure that became increasingly disliked in later periods as *kalām* was remodelled to resemble the Avicennan philosophical paradigm. That is not to say that al-Māturīdī thinks that one is unable to reach knowledge (*ilm*) or true justified belief, which is free of doubt: *episteme*. He just thinks that the route to that destination passes through tradition and the defeat of those possessing rival philosophical and theological views.

Finally, it is possible to reflect on some of the advantages that may accrue from what might appear to be a less epistemically rigorous system. First, it may be a more realistic approach to how epistemic activity occurs in human social life, making it more open to the insights of social epistemology. Second, it may be more robust and adaptable to social change, since it explicitly allows for tradition as a general epistemic source to develop and adapt over time. Third, it may embody a degree of epistemic humility, acknowledging without thereby falling prey to scepticism or doubt

98 This better accounts for al-Māturīdī's ideas than the 'dual epistemology' theory proposed by Hureyre Kam. In summary, Kam has suggested that al-Māturīdī distinguishes between a tripartite epistemology for general knowledge and a reason-tradition pairing exclusively for knowledge of religion. His rationale is that miracles, which are known through direct sensory perception, are no longer available after the time of prophecy. See Kam, 'Dual Epistemology', pp. 33–34. The theory finds a degree of support in Brodersen, *Tradition und Transformation in der Māturīdiyya des 6./12. Jahrhunderts*, p. 132. Kam's interpretation is not a tenable reading of al-Māturīdī's text, as a couple of examples will suffice to illustrate. First, near the end of his tripartite epistemological discussion, al-Māturīdī points out that inquiry (*naẓar*) is used together with the senses (or reports) in, among other things, affirming the miraculous inimitability of the Qur'an (al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, pp. 72–73). This not only directly pertains to establishing the truth of religion but, in the case of the ongoing experiential miracle of the Qur'an, undercuts Kam's rationale for excluding sense experience from the schema. Second, in criticising the application of the term 'body' to God, al-Māturīdī says that, if one could use the term 'without any sensory, narrational or rational evidence', then it would be possible to use words such as *jasad* (body or corpse) and *shakhṣ* (person), which would be corrupt (al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, p. 103). The significant point here is that al-Māturīdī cites sensory evidence as relevant to determining the proper description of God.

99 Cassin (ed.), 'Doxa'.

that there are limits to human epistemic capacities and opportunities to improve them. It is with this possibility in mind that we can return our attention to the contemporary intellectual environment.

Islamic Epistemology Today

It is appropriate to make a few remarks about prevailing understandings of Islamic epistemological discourse, especially in relation to the theological questions that are of principal concern within this volume. Our objective is not to provide a comprehensive account of the entire classical, postclassical and modern trajectory of Islamic thought, but at least to recognise the moment that we are in and thereby situate the present work within it. Interestingly, while many of the approaches to epistemology adopted by today's Islamic scholars producing constructive academic (or academic-adjacent) work in the English language represent a direct continuation of earlier traditions of thought, they also can be classified by the way in which they respond to the challenge of Enlightenment Evidentialism articulated earlier in this Introduction.

The first category, which can be taken as the dominant epistemological framework within Anglophone Islamic thought, broadly comes under the Natural Theology category discussed above. This is an internalist and evidentialist approach, the proponents of which believe that the challenge posed to provide evidence to justify belief in God can both be met in general and through the Islamic tradition in particular. A primary emphasis is therefore placed on rational argumentation, with a secondary focus on resources within the Islamic tradition, including those of scripture, especially the Qur'an. Beyond this, the category is extremely diverse. Some interlocutors have argued for the continued salience of early and classical *kalām* or *falsafa* as paradigmatic expressions of the Islamic theological tradition;¹⁰⁰ some have turned to the postclassical *kalām* tradition, seeing in its intricate philosophical distinctions unmatched epistemological riches;¹⁰¹ others have embraced the promise of *kalām jadīd* (renewed theology), in which the above-mentioned traditions are placed in varying dialogue with the ideas of contemporary thought, and a new up-to-date synthesis is sought. This is also, broadly speaking, where one could place many academic philosophers seeking

100 See Jalajel, 'Extraterrestrials and Moral Accountability'; Jalajel, 'Scientific Realism and Anti-Realism through the Lens of Sunni Divine Action Models'; Malik, *Islam and Evolution*; Andani, 'Divine Simplicity and the Myth of Modal Collapse'.

101 See Karamali, 'Theological Information on the Existence of Intelligent Life outside Our Solar System'; Khan, 'Shades of Structural Realism in Post-Classical Islamic Thought'.

to articulate a specifically Islamic approach to philosophy of religion or religious epistemology.¹⁰²

A quite different approach has been taken by those on the externalist path of a proposed Islamic Reformed Epistemology or Proper Functionalism. Such a perspective typically places considerable emphasis on the idea of *fiṭra*, seeking to explain how Plantingian arguments for the basicity of theism and Christian belief can be turned towards the idea of a natural and universal Islamic belief. Although the representatives of this perspective find themselves in the cut-and-thrust of intellectual argument, a core aspect of their position is that such arguments are not needed in order for one's beliefs to be justified. This perspective is also often critical of the rational arguments prevalent within the circles of historical and contemporary *kalām*, as well as being associated with the theological ideas of Ibn Taymiyya.¹⁰³

Finally, even though Wittgensteinian Fideism is not formally supported by major participants in contemporary Islamic epistemological discussions, there are those whose response to the challenge of Enlightenment Evidentialism contains an irreducible appeal to the supra-rational categories of the Sufi tradition, especially the ideas of Ibn 'Arabī. Arguably, in doing so, such interlocutors make the parallel move of carving out for themselves a sphere of discourse that is insulated from publicly rational evidential requirements. This allows for an internally consistent epistemological paradigm that gives little ground to the claims of Enlightenment Evidentialism, although it also may struggle to convince audiences beyond its own discursive boundaries.¹⁰⁴

The present volume, albeit not claiming to comprehensively capture every perspective that is currently on the table within Islamic thought, offers a good basis to develop this dynamic conversation. This can be encapsulated in three major contributions:

1. Taking stock of key trends, figures and concepts within Islamic intellectual history, which act as the resources for new epistemological theorising.
2. Comparing relevant thinkers and epistemological approaches within Islam and Christianity, thereby showing the relevance of interdisciplinary engagement between the two traditions.

102 See Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*; Chowdhury, 'God, Gaps and Gluts'; Chowdhury, 'God, Logic and Lies'; Chowdhury, *Islamic Theology and the Problem of Evil*; Muhtaroglu, 'Plantinga and Ash'arites on Divine Simplicity'; Moad, *Coherence of the Incoherence*; Zarepour, 'Avicenna on Empty Intentionality'.

103 See Turner, 'An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology'; Jalajel, 'Scientific Realism and Anti-Realism through the Lens of Sunnī Divine Action Models'.

104 See Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islām*; Lahham, *The Anatomy of Knowledge*; Spiker, *Things as They Are*.

3. Identifying the academic subfield of analytic Islamic epistemology and advancing its own 'state of the art' in terms of specific inquiries and themes.

What remains is to explain how the selection of chapters collected here achieves these aims.

Summary of Chapters

This volume is structured in five parts, with each part featuring a trio of chapters. The parts are sequenced in broadly chronological order, moving through Islamic intellectual history in two phases, to comparative Islamic-Christian studies, contemporary Islamic-Christian debates and, finally, possible avenues of new Islamic epistemological investigation.

Part I is titled 'Epistemology outside *Kalām: Falsafa*, Traditionalism and Sufism'. The volume opens with the three non-*kalām* traditions discussed earlier in this Introduction. This opening was chosen for a few reasons. First, the figures that have been selected for study by the contributors to this part typically lived in the formative period before the end of the fourth/tenth century (the exception being Ibn Taymiyya, although he strongly connects himself to the early period). Thus, it makes sense to highlight the diversity of epistemological views in the early Islamic tradition before moving on to a focused study of *kalām* in its classical and postclassical forms in Part II. Second, this initial set of chapters raises crucial questions about evidential certainty, basicality and the complex inner workings of the human heart and mind that resonate throughout the remainder of the book.

In the opening chapter of the volume, 'A New Look at al-Fārābī on Philosophy *versus* Theology', Anthony Booth challenges the received interpretation of al-Fārābī on the relationship between philosophy and theology. Contemporary scholarship has generally concluded that he takes the former to be epistemically superior to the latter; that the latter operates only at the level of rhetoric and dialectics; and that the former deals with demonstrative proof, such that only philosophers can attain proper certainty (on an Aristotelian understanding of it). Booth seeks to cast some doubt as to whether al-Fārābī really thinks that there is such a sharp distinction between the two. He does this by looking anew at his account of certainty, proposing that the importance of understanding and non-accidentality in his account has the following two corollaries: only prophetic knowledge can yield full certainty; and the difference between philosophy and theology cannot be about which of the two grants full certainty. According to Booth, the Fārābian picture of the relationship between them thus turns out to be a more complicated but also more intellectually resonant one.

In his chapter, 'God as an Empirical Entity: The Expanded Scope of Sense Perception in Sunnī Traditionalist Spatialism', Jon Hoover examines the Islamic Traditionalists al-Dārimī (d. ca 281/894), pseudo-Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (*Al-Radd 'ala al-zanādiqa wa-l-Jahmiyya*, fifth/eleventh century) and Ibn Taymiyya who adopt a radically empiricist epistemology that does not lead to scepticism about God's existence but instead embraces God as an empirical reality. These Traditionalist authors blame Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/746) for introducing the inaccessibility of God to sense perception into the Islamic tradition and thereby stripping God of the fullness of His perfection. With varying degrees of sophistication, al-Dārimī, pseudo-Aḥmad and Ibn Taymiyya claim that all existents are perceptible to the senses, and they deny the existence of extramental immaterial realities and incorporeal intelligibles. God is likewise accessible to the outer senses, particularly hearing and sight. Some of God's messengers have heard and seen God in this life, and believers will see God in Paradise. The chapter explores the implications of this radical empiricism for Traditionalist theology with regard to God's spatial location and extension, and it makes the larger point that religious epistemology is intertwined with ontology and conceptions of God.

Harith Ramli in 'The Tripartite Division of Knowledge and Belief in al-Makkī's *Nourishment of the Hearts*' proposes that the study of religious epistemology in early Islamic thought (third-fifth/ninth-eleventh centuries) has understandably focused mainly on the more explicitly 'rationalist' traditions of *kalām* and *falsafa*. However, most emerging traditions in this period increasingly found it necessary to justify their intellectual foundations, not least the science of Sufism (*ilm al-taṣawwuf*). Focusing on the *Qūt al-qulūb* of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996), Ramli looks at how an early proponent of what we tend to refer to today as Sufism attempted to ground the spiritual insights of the 'scholars of the esoteric' (*ulamā' al-bāṭin*) on the intellectual foundations of the 'exoteric sciences' (*ulūm al-zāhir*). By studying the tripartite epistemology of al-Makkī against earlier discourses, such as that of al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), while paying special attention to the idea of 'inner motive powers' (*khawāṭir*), Ramli explores its implications for the foundations of knowledge at both an individual and social level.

Part II has been named 'Epistemological Sources in *Kalām*: Perception, Reason and Testimony'. The studies here take as their subject classical and postclassical *kalām*, especially the epistemology of the Ash'arī school, albeit with limited reference to Māturīdism. As well as pursuing distinctive lines of investigation touching on the contributions of key figures within these traditions, each of the chapters in this part has a focus on one of the three main epistemic sources admissible within the standard Sunnī *kalām* framework.

In 'How to Know? Justifying Experience in Classical *Kalām*', Hannah Erlwein investigates the role of sense experience as proof and as a way to knowledge in *kalām*. Early generations of Islamic theologians were convinced that experienceable phenomena could yield knowledge about unexperienceable phenomena. They referred to this form of reasoning by names such as *al-istishhād bi-l-shāhid 'alā al-ghā'ib* (bearing witness by what is experienceable to what is unexperienceable). Later generations, however, came to reduce the epistemic role of experience to a mere illustrative tool and replaced their predecessors' reasoning by other proofs. This chapter reconstructs the shift in the perceived epistemic value of experience in *kalām* through a case study. In his *Kitāb al-shāmil*, Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī gives an account of debates among Ash'arī and Mu'tazilī theologians about Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī's (d. 324/936) invocation of certain experienceable phenomena in his proof that the world depends on God. Erlwein argues that what is at stake in these debates can be illuminated by the contemporary idea of the 'theory-ladenness' of experience – that is, the entanglement of empirical data with theoretical assumptions. In her case study, the central point of contention concerns the epistemological relevance of different theories of causality.

Laura Hassan presents a chapter titled 'Divine Freedom meets Logical Necessity: On the Relationship between Rational Speculation and Knowledge in Classical Ash'arī Foundationalism'. She argues that classical Ash'arīs were supremely committed to the preservation, through rational proofs, of their theology of divine freedom, which was effected through the framework provided by their ontology of atoms and accidents. She considers one intersection of the ontology of the classical Ash'arīs with their foundationalist rationality. This is a dispute recorded by Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī with a position he ascribes to Abū Ishāq al-Isfarā'īnī (d. 418/1027) on whether it is possible for discursive knowledge to be acquired in the absence of reasoning (*naẓar*). Against al-Isfarā'īnī (but in continuity with the thought of Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī [d. 403/1013]), al-Juwaynī insists that it is impossible for God to fail to create an accident of knowledge subsequent to His creation of accidents of sound reasoning that include knowledge of a genuinely indicative proof (*dalīl*). Hassan argues that al-Juwaynī's admission of this rare constraint on divine freedom entirely befits the project of Ash'arī rationalism. Indeed, without its acknowledgement as a metaphysical necessity, Ash'arī foundationalism falls.

In his chapter, 'Mass Transmission of Prophetic Miracles in the Contemplation and Proof of Core Creed', Aaron Spevack suggests that the necessity to reflect on faith (*wujūb al-naẓar*) leads to the question of just how deep one must go into this reflection and how one might go about ensuring that the reflective process leads to certainty rather than doubt. He argues that responses vary, but one that has not received sufficient attention is the role

of mass-transmitted knowledge (*tawātur*) of prophetic miracles in entailing sound faith and excusing one from the need to defend their beliefs *via* complex rational proofs or appeals to inherent and ingrained faith (*fiṭra*). The chapter treats discussions of mass transmission of Qur'anic teachings and prophetic precedents as a certainty-producing epistemological channel in the writings of postclassical Muslim theologians. In particular, the treatment of Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 793/1390) on the proof of core creed is contrasted with the more stringent rational demands of the so-called Sanūsian and modified Sanūsian models.

Part III, 'Comparative Studies in Islamic and Christian Epistemology', starts to shift the volume towards placing Islamic religious epistemology within a wider contemporary theistic frame. Contributors attend to both parallels and differences between their chosen thinkers, especially focusing on how engagement with Christian thought, which is better known within English-language academic study, can help one to grapple with varied Islamic ideas.

In 'The Epistemological Status of Causation within al-Ghazālī's Cosmological Argument in Light of Reid's Modest Foundationalism', Ayşenur Ünügür-Tabur explores al-Ghazālī's occasionalist account of causation and its interaction with his cosmological argument, along with his foundationalist epistemological position. She poses the query of whether occasionalism makes his cosmological argument question-begging on epistemological grounds. Specifically, she raises the problem that the 'constant conjunction' of events by God's occasional creation may be too weak and inconclusive to ground the causal premise used in the cosmological argument. She goes on to argue that a plausible resolution of this problem for al-Ghazālī can be found when comparing his epistemic position to the Modest Foundationalism of Thomas Reid.

Amir Emami, in his chapter "Is There any Doubt about God?": Maktab-i Taṣkīk's Religious Epistemology in Comparison with Reformed Epistemology', examines parallel modern responses to strong foundationalism in religious epistemology. He compares Reformed epistemology in Christian theology, as championed by Alvin Plantinga, and the Maktab-i Taṣkīk within Shī'ī theology, founded by Mīrzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī. Emami points out that there are some notable similarities within the two schools of thought, including the idea that belief in God's existence does not need to be demonstrated through intellectual reasoning, as well as a similar role for the *sensus divinitatis* and the *fiṭra*, respectively, as aspects of the human being that lead to knowledge of God. Nevertheless, some important differences are shown to hold between the two epistemological theories, which reflect the traditions in which they are embedded and the interlocutors with which they engage.

In his contribution 'Knowing God Personally: Second-person Knowledge in Christian and Islamic Analytic Theology', David Worsley explores

recent developments in the study of the concept of personal knowledge in Christian analytic theology. He argues that applying Eleonore Stump's distinction between non-propositional 'Franciscan' knowledge and propositional 'Dominican' knowledge can be helpful in treating important themes in religious epistemology. Worsley looks at the case of second-person knowledge and extends it to personal knowledge of God, as well as to ideas of divine union and ineffability, highlighting also the significance of narrative. In the final section, he shows how the ideas that he develops are relevant to Islamic theological thought.

Part IV, 'Contemporary Debates on the Basicity of Islamic and Christian Belief', situates the present volume at the heart of an important ongoing debate between Islamic and Christian philosophers of religion. In its simplest terms, this concerns whether the idea that belief in God is properly basic, as prominently argued for by Plantinga, has a place within Islamic religious epistemology. Yet 'Reformed' Christian philosophers did not limit their epistemic claims to this minimal threshold and went on to argue that religion-specific beliefs of Christianity can be warranted in the same way. This raises the question of whether this argument ought to be available to Islamic theologians, and what then can be done to resolve the disagreement in either direction.

In his chapter on 'Fitra Foundationalism', Jamie Turner draws on the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya to elucidate a religious epistemology that is predicated on the concept of the *fiṭra* (natural disposition), a faculty of innate knowledge that can secure warranted belief for epistemic agents. He argues that such a Taymiyyan epistemology can stand as a viable alternative to classical foundationalist models of justification prevalent in traditional *kalām*. He carefully builds up his account of Ibn Taymiyya's normative and religious epistemology from first principles and shows how it paves the way for a more moderate form of foundationalism, one which rejects a theistic evidentialist picture for a different vision that is grounded in the *fiṭra* and the basicity of religious belief. As well as paying attention to the innate capacity of the human being to come to possess knowledge, he highlights the importance of the environment for human epistemic states. After developing the model as a contemporary epistemological theory in considerable detail, Turner formulates responses to a number of pertinent objections.

In 'Dealing with Defeaters for Warranted Islamic Belief: A Reply to Turner', Erik Baldwin seeks to move forward an existing debate over Islamic versions of Plantingian Proper Functionalism. He first clarifies what he sees as misunderstandings in an article by Jamie Turner who had previously presented his Taymiyyan model as superior to Baldwin's own earlier proposal. Next, Baldwin presents what he calls the Multiple Viable Extensions (MVE) defeater. This is the idea that a rational 'Plantingian' who holds their own

tradition-specific religious belief as warranted ought to acquire a defeater from their knowledge that Plantingians of other religions are in the same epistemic situation. Baldwin argues that, *contra* Turner, his model has the resources to deal with this problem. His idea is that initial *qalb* beliefs that give basic warrant are subject to doubts from '*aq^l*' beliefs – such as knowledge of the MVE defeater – and can then be defeated in turn by '*aq^l*' beliefs, restoring warrant. Baldwin finally suggests that a synthesis between his model and that of Turner could prove superior to either one alone.

K. Scott Oliphint in his 'Creation, Sin and Salvation: Essential Categories for a Christian-Theistic Epistemology' stakes out his epistemological vision for a Reformed Christian-Theistic Epistemology. At the heart of his account is the acknowledgement within Christian thought that the human being is a covenantal creature, one made in the image of God. This, according to Oliphint, initially secured a good epistemic standing. Yet with the event of the Fall, sin has distorted these faculties in a major way, such as to make natural religious knowledge impossible. The only way in which the human *sensus divinitatis* can operate correctly once more is from the salvation offered by trust in Jesus Christ. Oliphint puts this framework for the basicity of Christian belief into conversation with Turner's Taymiyyan model and its concept of the *fiṭra*. Here, Oliphint argues for the superiority of his model based on the way in which it accounts for the pervasive effects of sin on the human being's epistemic state in terms of one's breaking of the covenant and the suppression of truth.

In Part V of the volume, 'Islamic Epistemology Today: Disciplinary, Scriptural and Social Discourses', the focus shifts to considering what the future of analytic Islamic epistemology may hold in terms of significant distinct themes. From light-hearted advice for the craft of analytic philosophy; through returning to the core Islamic scripture, the Qur'an, with new 'virtue epistemological' eyes; to scoping the prospects for an Islamic 'social turn', the final set of contributors takes stock of this nascent field and moves the conversation forward.

In 'Advice for Muslim Epistemologists', Kelly James Clark riffs on Plantinga's 1984 essay 'Advice to Christian Philosophers', penning some practical and enlightening advice for Muslims seeking to engage in the field of analytic epistemology within the contemporary academy. He explores this topic through the questions of 'what?' (consideration of appropriate content), 'who?' (sensitivity to one's audience) and 'why?' (aims of engaging in epistemological study). Drawing on his own published work and long engagement in the field of analytic Christian epistemology, as well as his interactions with Muslim scholars, Clark maps out some of the main pitfalls that he feels can be avoided by Muslims seeking to contribute to this discourse. He ends with some brief constructive reflections on what it means epistemologically to be a creature.

In his chapter, 'Epistemological Foundations of Qur'anic Ethics: Understanding, Wisdom and Righteousness', M. Ashraf Adeel argues that the Qur'anic discourse insists on what in contemporary terms may be called a virtue epistemology. Holistic understanding is a state that results from the many virtuously formed true beliefs in it and grasping of their interdependencies. Most of these true beliefs need to have attained the status of knowledge. Rounding out this conceptual map of Qur'anic epistemology is the notion of wisdom, which he reads as a kind of practical meta-understanding, and *taqwā* (righteousness), which is a settled disposition for right action produced by it. By exploring the nuances of these concepts within the Qur'an and some of its classical commentaries and by relating them to Islamic discourses about the human soul, Adeel is able to propose an epistemological reading of the Qur'anic notion of conscience and the kind of ethical rationality needed to reach it.

Closing out the main part of the volume with his chapter 'Individualism and Anti-individualism in Islamic Epistemology', John Greco considers how the 'social turn' in epistemology might be fruitful when applied to the Islamic tradition. In the first part of the chapter, he proposes a particular conception of social epistemic dependence, which he argues helps understanding what is at issue between individualists and anti-individualists in epistemology. Greco argues that social epistemic dependence is best conceived as a kind of 'vulnerable' dependence. That is, it is a dependence on other persons (or on other aspects of one's social environment), with no guarantee that those persons (or environment) are dependable. In the second part of the chapter, he asks whether Islamic epistemology should be understood as individualist or anti-individualist and, specifically, whether Islamic epistemology allows for vulnerable dependence in the epistemic domain. He therefore asks how the Islamic tradition understands the epistemology of testimony, especially with respect to the testimony of scripture and the prophets. Second, he asks to what extent the Islamic tradition endorses an intellectual division of labour within Islamic communities. Rather than seeking answers, Greco's contribution is to raise interesting and important questions through the resources of contemporary social epistemology for others who specialise in the Islamic tradition to explore further.

The volume is capped with a brief Afterword by the editors who reflect on themes explored by the contributions, on questions answered and new ones raised in analytic Islamic epistemology.

Notes about This Volume

Many edited volumes are collections of convenience more than design. Some loose organising principle is adopted to give structure to chapters on an admittedly related theme, but one would lose little by reading the contents in

any other order, or if they were published as separate online articles instead. Our deliberate intent in the process of scholarly collaboration that led to this volume, as well as subsequent editorial work on it, has been to resist this tendency and to produce a single book with its own internal logic, as the overview provided in the previous section should have brought into focus. With the stage-setting provided in this Introduction, we hope that readers of all kinds will feel confident enough to tackle the book in its printed order, even if they lack a background in Islamic studies or analytic epistemology. Realistically, however, we know that academic readers of this kind will likely be in the minority. A second viable way to go is for readers interested in pre-modern Islamic intellectual history to focus on Parts I and II, those looking for comparative theology to read Parts III and IV, and those intrigued by modern and contemporary debates to explore Parts III, IV and V. We feel that this 'modular' aspect of the volume is a great strength, with the different chapters within each part speaking to each other in all sorts of interesting ways. Nevertheless, each chapter is fully self-contained and does not rely on any other chapter for its argument to be appreciated.

Terminology and vocabulary within this volume have presented a challenge, with both the technical Arabic lexicon of the Islamic philosophical and theological tradition and the technical English one of the analytic traditions taking their respective places. Glossaries with key terminology for each of these domains can be found at the back of the book. Additionally, as editors, we have worked hard to make sure that there is clarity and consistency to each chapter, in line with the series style of Edinburgh Studies in Islamic Scripture and Theology, while allowing individual authors to breathe in expressing their preferred approach. We are pleased with the result as a collective intervention, not only in the ongoing quest to know God, but also in overcoming the epistemic barriers that prevent us from better knowing each other within and between our religious traditions.

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PART I

Epistemology outside *Kalām*: *Falsafa*, Traditionalism and Sufism

CHAPTER 1

A New Look at al-Fārābī on Philosophy versus Theology

Anthony Robert Booth

Introduction

What did the famous Islamic Philosopher Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) think the relationship between philosophy and theology is? The received interpretation is that he thought philosophy is epistemically superior to theology; that the latter operates only at the level of rhetoric and dialectics; and that the former deals with demonstrative proof, such that only the philosophers can attain proper certainty (on an Aristotelian understanding of it, see below). The difference between theology and philosophy on this account is that theology cannot yield certainty, whereas philosophy can.¹ This interpretation was first associated with Leo Strauss and his school of interpretation (one sees this interpretation, for instance, in the works of Muhsin Mahdi, Miriam Galston, Charles Butterworth and Joshua Parens), but it now goes way beyond that, such that one sees it in less explicitly ‘Straussian’ and canonical interpreters writing in English (often in introductory

1 I will use ‘theology’ broadly here, not just to denote al-Fārābī’s views on *‘ilm al-kalām*, but also for his views on religion more broadly – specifically his views about belief arrived at solely through immersion in religion (such as the reading of scripture). Indeed, al-Fārābī is mostly interested in the latter rather than the former, and he only discusses *kalām* explicitly in one work, his *The Enumeration of the Sciences* (while he talks of religion in many other works). But for him theology is clearly related to religion, in the way in which philosophers are related to reason. That is, ‘theology’ broadly speaking is the study of religion such that it engenders belief through such study, although here ‘study’ is meant to denote the arrival of belief through study of scripture and immersion in religious practice alone. A further difficulty regards al-Fārābī’s distinction between virtuous and non-virtuous religions. Here, the received view is that, even in the virtuous religion, belief acquired *via* religion alone will be inferior to belief acquired through philosophy. Thanks to Catarina Belo for very useful discussion on this matter.

commentaries), such as Peter Adamson, Deborah Black, Majid Fakhry and Ian Netton.² In this chapter, I seek to cast some doubt as to whether al-Fārābī really thought that there was such a sharp distinction between theology and philosophy. Let me start this section by first saying what I mean by ‘epistemically superior’ and then move on to explain why people attribute this view to al-Fārābī. I will then propose an alternative interpretation, and how it bears on his account of the relationship between philosophy and theology, proposing that the importance of understanding and non-accidentality in his account has the following two corollaries: only prophetic knowledge can yield full certainty; and the difference between philosophy and theology cannot be about which of the two grants full certainty. I then attempt to explain away the textual evidence that scholars marshal in favour of the received view.

The Received View of al-Fārābī on Philosophy versus Theology

It is uncontroversial that al-Fārābī was keenly interested in logic – ‘logic’ here being understood to comprise epistemology as well as the practices of demonstration, dialectics and rhetoric. Al-Fārābī wrote several works on these matters, including *Conditions of Certitude* (*Sharā’iṭ al-yaqīn*) and *Epitome of the Posterior Analytics* (*Kitāb al-burhān*): Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics* was well-known among Muslim scholars. This latter work is a work of meta-logic, which gives us an account of what the most certain and best kind of knowledge is – what Aristotle terms ‘demonstrative proof’. We know a proposition demonstratively, according to Aristotle, when we know that proposition *via* a deductively sound syllogism, whose middle term is either a first principle or derived from a first principle, which explains why the conclusion is true. First principles are principles that are somehow directly grasped and cannot be derived from other principles or sets of propositions. While this demand looks in keeping with foundationalist epistemologies, the demand that these principles be explanatory does not. This might already make Aristotle’s theory of knowledge difficult to place within contemporary classification of theories of knowledge – I will come back to this point later.

Al-Fārābī seems to accept this definition of demonstrative proof; however, as I will explain later, he does raise some interesting questions

2 For example, Fakhry, *Al-Fārābī*, and Netton, *Al-Fārābī and His School*. An interesting, stark exception to this is Massimo Campanini’s essay ‘Alfarabi and the Foundation of Political Theology in Islam’. While I will not have the space to detail how, my interpretation differs considerably from Campanini’s. For apposite criticism of Campanini’s view, see Butterworth, ‘Alfarabi’s Goal: Political Philosophy, Not Political Theology’.

for it, and almost all of his works contain mention of this notion. Philosophy done correctly, for al-Fārābī, ought to grant us such demonstrative proof and – so the thought goes for the received interpretation – will yield us certainty.

Aside from being well-known as a logician, al-Fārābī is also known to be the first of the *falāsifa* to have grappled with the philosophical issues attendant to a revealed religion, especially in the context of a Mu'tazilī (what I call 'evidentialist' and some people call 'rationalist') conception of doxastic normativity, whereby one ought to believe what is in the Qur'an only because the truth of what is in the Qur'an can be demonstrated on the basis of independent evidence.³ This accords with Mu'tazilī general realism on ethical matters and emphasis on God's justice: there are normative facts that determine what we ought to believe and how we ought to behave, and God, who is just, rewards and punishes us in virtue of, and consistently with, those facts.

Al-Kindī (d. ca 259/873), who is often credited with having kick-started the *falsafa* tradition, subscribed to a sort of value-monism about epistemic value. What holds unique epistemic value is the truth – the truth is what uniquely governs what we ought to believe (*pace* the Mu'tazila). This leads directly, for him, to an account of the relationship between religion and reason, prophecy and philosophy: what is in the Qur'an ought to be believed because it is true and, to the extent that philosophy uncovers anything that is true, it cannot possibly be in contradiction to it. As I have argued in *Islamic Philosophy and the Ethics of Belief*, this also commits al-Kindī to a sort of evidentialism (which here is compatible with epistemological foundationalism as it is just the view that there can be no non-epistemic reasons for belief).⁴ For al-Kindī, this had a direct result on what we should think is the relationship between theology and philosophy: that they are on an epistemic par. They are simply different paths to arrive at the same truth (one can get to the truth by studying and interpreting the Qur'an and Hadith, or one can get to the truth *via* independent reasoning, perhaps assisted by reading Plato and Aristotle). But since truth is the only thing of epistemic (and also ultimately religious) value, there is nothing to decide between each method. Each is as good as the other, and it does not even matter if one gets you to your destination quicker than the next – speed is irrelevant, only truth is relevant.

But this of course raises the issue, which al-Fārābī picks up on, of what the unique epistemic purpose of prophecy is: if all we need is to engage

3 See Booth, *Islamic Philosophy and the Ethics of Belief*, p. 27.

4 Booth, *Islamic Philosophy and the Ethics of Belief*, p. 18. A non-epistemic reason is what one might have in mind when one thinks that one ought to believe in God simply because God commands it, or believes one is beautiful because it makes one feel better.

our rational faculties to discover the truth, why did God need to send us a Qur'an? Writing about the contemporaries of al-Fārābī (Abū Bakr al-Rāzī [d. 313/92]⁵ and Abū al-Qāsim al-Ka'bī [d. 319/931]), Peter Adamson has remarked:

This material illustrates a trap into which not just al-Ka'bī, but all Mu'tazilites, were in danger of falling. By putting so much emphasis on the autonomy of reason, especially in the ethical sphere, they were in danger of leaving no room for prophecy.⁵

The standing view regarding al-Fārābī is that he holds there to be a difference in the epistemic status of beliefs at which one arrives through reason and those at which one arrives through consulting and studying prophecy (as *per* the practices of the theologians). Only through demonstrative proof (that is, philosophy) can one attain full certainty. One might attain a level of certainty through theology,⁶ but theology is at best concerned with rhetoric and dialectics. This is directly related to the issue of the epistemic uniqueness of prophecy: al-Fārābī admits that not everyone will have the ability to harness the independent power of reason, so that a just God will perforce have given them some other means to attain knowledge of Him. Thus, God sends down a Qur'an, which presents the truth through allegories and symbols, as well as in context, for everyone – and not just a cognitive elect – to be able to understand. This means that for al-Fārābī there was a differential in the normative demands made on belief: if one is a member of the epistemic elite, one ought to believe on the basis of epistemic reason alone; if not, one can believe for non-epistemic reason such as on the basis of allegory. I think this position is usefully called 'Islamic Moderate Evidentialism'.⁷ Hence, the supposed 'epistemic superiority' granted to philosophy as against theology is that the former, not the latter, provides complete certainty. It is advantageous, so claims al-Fārābī, since it makes one immune to being persuaded by errant sophistry – keeping one tethered to the truth, as Plato's famous statues of Daedalus in the *Meno* need to be.

So why do people think that al-Fārābī held this view? I think there are at least four things that can be brought to bear on this:

5 Adamson, *Al-Rāzī*, p. 151.

6 Deborah Black's important essay 'Knowledge (*'ilm*) and Certitude (*yaqīn*) in Al-Fārābī's Epistemology' describes his 'central insight' as being the identification of different levels of certainty – that certainty is not an all-or-nothing affair.

7 This is to differentiate it from Aquinas' version (or perhaps 'Western' Moderate Evidentialism) where the restriction on Evidentialism is about what propositions Evidentialism applies to (for instance, it cannot apply to the proposition that God is Triune).

1. What he says about Aristotle's idea regarding metaphysics as 'first philosophy'.
2. Explicit remarks made about the inferiority of religion in his *The Book of Religion*.
3. Remarks he makes in a political context about happiness being unavailable to those who do not live in a city run by philosophers (happiness being here knowledge).
4. An unappreciative account of *kalām* given in his *The Enumeration of the Sciences*.

Let me go through each briefly in turn. Regarding (1), in his short work on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, he complains about how people have misunderstood Aristotle in thinking that 'first philosophy' must be theology because God is the unmoved mover, or first cause, in Aristotle's system. That is, it is a mistake to infer, as had al-Kindī, that because the first cause is God and that first philosophy (that is, a philosophy that looks into what is most fundamental) must look to what is God, and since that is a theological enterprise, first philosophy must be theology. Al-Fārābī's claim here is that first philosophy must look at all the most primary things, God being one of them, but so also first principles, like the law of non-contradiction.⁸

Regarding (2), we find, in his *Book of Religion*, the following passage directly addressing the relationship between religion and philosophy:

Therefore, the two parts of which religion consists are subordinate to philosophy. For something is said to be a part of a science or to be subordinate to a science in one or two ways: either the demonstrative proofs of what is assumed in it without demonstrative proofs occur in that science, or the science comprising the universals is the one that gives the reasons for the particulars subordinate to it [...] since it is the theoretical part of philosophy that gives demonstrative proofs for the theoretical part of religion, it is philosophy, then, that gives the demonstrative proofs of what virtuous religion encompasses.⁹

This looks like clear textual evidence for the position which we have earlier called Islamic Moderate Evidentialism: only philosophy gives one demonstrative proof, and the point of religion is to give a symbolic form to these truths for the purposes of the public. This accords well with al-Fārābī's account of how prophecy works. Building on the work of al-Kindī on

8 See Adamson, *Philosophy in the Islamic World*, p. 67; Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*.

9 Al-Fārābī, *Book of Religion*, p. 97.

prophetic dreams,¹⁰ he takes the prophetic mind to be different from the ordinary human mind, not in so much that it has a superior intellect, but in having a more developed faculty of imagination. When this human mind comes to grasp all the intelligibles from the Active Intellect (a superhuman intelligence that permanently thinks all the intelligibles) and comes to inhabit a state al-Fārābī calls the Acquired Intellect, an emanation occurs from the Active Intellect into this stronger imagination. The Active Intellect then does its work in the faculty of the imagination. Hence, the kind of intellectual ‘seeing’ that we feel when, for instance, we intuit the law of non-contradiction, or that Gettier cases are not cases of knowledge, now takes on, for the prophet, a symbolic, allegorical form.¹¹ This, importantly, allows the prophet to see all the intelligibles at once and to see the connection between them. I will come back to that point later, which I think is extremely important, but this leads al-Fārābī to claim that the prophet is the ideal political leader, since he is able to explain the fundamental truths of the universe in a way that everyone can understand, and this, as he tells us in the *Book of Religion*, is really the point of scripture.¹²

This all dove-tails with the point as regards (3). It seems that in his *The Political Regime*, the supreme ruler of a perfect state is both a philosopher and a prophet. But the prophet ultimately finds justification for his prophecy in philosophy.¹³ As Charles Butterworth has put it: ‘All that is said and

10 See Al-Kindī, *On the Quiddity of Sleep and Dreams*.

11 For instance, as Ceylan has put it: ‘The answer al-Fārābī offers to this question is that the intelligibles take on various imaginary shapes in the faculty of representation so that they become understandable to the prophet as well as to the masses who are instructed in a picture-language reflecting the image-formulations of intelligibles in the mind of the prophet’. See Ceylan, ‘Some Remarks on Al-Fārābī’s Views on the Relationship between Philosophy and Religion’, p. 78.

12 In private correspondence, Joshua Parens has made the case to me that, while al-Fārābī accepts that this emanation can happen, it is somehow improper, ‘[the] proper place [of the Active Intellect] is in the theoretical reason, and sometimes with particulars in the form of sensibles whose proper place is in practical reason’ (al-Fārābī, *The Perfect State*, p. 221). Further, we ought to make a distinction between ‘revelation’ and ‘prophecy’ such that ‘revelation’ is just philosophy when it combines theoretical and practical reason, whereas ‘prophecy’ is more about visions and divinations. However, given that al-Fārābī clearly thinks ‘prophecy’ is more than this, and that the best realisation of practical reason is in the ‘first ruler’ who must have the skills to persuade people (which is what he says prophecy gives us), I find making a hard distinction between the two difficult. I will not discuss this line of argument for the received view further. The received view is meant to be so obvious that it hardly warrants discussion (I have been deemed stupid for not seeing it as obvious, for example). If the primary argument for the received view turns on this distinction, it is far from obvious in that way.

13 ‘This human being [the ‘First Ruler’] is the king in truth according to the ancients, and he is the one of whom it ought to be said that he receives revelation. For a human being receives revelation only when he obtains this rank’. Al-Fārābī, *Political Regime*, p. 69.

done by [the] supreme ruler finds justification in philosophy, and religion thus depends on philosophy – theoretical as well as practical’.¹⁴

What the prophet adds to philosophy *qua* prophet are his rhetorical and dialectical skills, such that he may ‘direct them [human beings] towards happiness’.¹⁵ But these skills would be useless without being grounded in philosophical knowledge. Further, al-Fārābī tells us that happiness is not possible for anyone unless they live in a city that is run by philosophers, and in his *The Attainment of Happiness* he tells us (presumably following Aristotle in the *Nichomachean Ethics*)¹⁶ that human happiness is what happens when we come to realise our intellectual potential and come to have an Acquired Intellect – connecting to the Active Intellect and, therefore, in some sense transcending our bodily, earthly existences.¹⁷

Finally, as regards (4), in his *The Enumeration of the Sciences*, al-Fārābī identifies three different types of *kalām* theologian:

- (i) theologians who think there is really no place for independent reason in understanding scripture and that we should just accept it on the basis of miracles, and then at face-value;
- (ii) theologians who take a more critical attitude than denoted in (i) (presumably the Mu‘tazila) and who are willing to use reason to try to iron out apparent textual contradictions in scripture;
- (iii) theologians who are just interested in inter-religious debate and exposing the internal contradictions of rival religions.¹⁸

He is most dismissive of those in group (iii) whom he claims to engage in cheap tricks to win arguments; he describes the practitioners of this group to be in arguing as if in a ‘state of war’ and so only interested in winning the argument¹⁹ – precisely how Plato had characterised the Sophists. But for al-Fārābī all of the types of theologian presented here are in a kind of state of self-deception: they act as if they had gained the warrant for certainty in their claims when really they were at most engaged in dialectics

14 Butterworth, ‘Introduction to *Political Regime*’, p. xi.

15 Al-Fārābī, *Political Regime*, p. 69.

16 Al-Fārābī is credited with writing a commentary on the latter, which is unfortunately lost.

17 ‘So now we know what al-Fārābī would like us to do, fully realize our potential for knowledge, by working our way up from familiar things to genuinely primary things, and grasping all the sciences as one interlocking system. This constitutes what he calls “ultimate happiness” for mankind (hence the title of his work, *The Attainment of Happiness*)’. Adamson, *Philosophy in the Islamic World*, p. 67.

18 Al-Fārābī, *Enumeration of the Sciences*, section 5.

19 ‘They did not care whether they used falsehood, deceit, slander or disdain . . .’ Al-Fārābī, *Enumeration of the Sciences*, p. 83.

and rhetoric. This is because (i) engages in mere *taqlīd* (following without rational evidence), (ii) in dialectics and (iii) in rhetoric – thus none arrive at the thing that can ground proper certainty: demonstrative proof. Only the philosopher can do that. This coheres with what al-Fārābī says in his *Epitome of the Posterior Analytics* where he calls the sort of assent given by the Mu‘tazila as ‘the most remote from certainty’ and where both dialectics and rhetoric are said to yield merely ‘accidental certainty’.²⁰

Thus, we have a picture in which al-Fārābī has it that philosophy is superior to theology, because it is only through philosophy that one can achieve warranted certainty. Since the unique function of Scripture is to educate the masses through symbols, theology (alone) can at best only achieve sub-demonstrative knowledge *via* dialectical and rhetorical argument. I think this picture, however, is not quite accurate. I will now proceed with providing an alternative interpretation: first on what his account of certainty involves, contrasting it to the views of Deborah Black, and second on what that means for the relationship between philosophy and theory. I will then move on to explain away the textual evidence for the received view (that is, explain why it does not refute my purported interpretation).

A New Interpretation

What I think is missing in the received interpretation is a more nuanced view regarding al-Fārābī’s idea of what absolute, and non-absolute, certainty comprises. In this section, therefore, I try to provide this alternative view and then move on, in the next section, to discuss what this means for his account of the relationship between philosophy and theology. What I take to unify and ground everything that I am about to say about these things is his critique of *taqlīd*. That is, not just the kind of theologian who thinks we should unquestioningly accept everything in scripture, but also those who seek mere knowledge of discreet, individual truths (even when they are necessary, timeless truths) are engaged in a kind of *taqlīd* – to attain proper certainty we need more than that: we need to understand these truths.

In al-Fārābī’s short, but very important work, *The Conditions of Certitude*, he presents six conditions (or six differentia) for achieving proper certainty:

Absolute certainty is:

- (1) to believe of something that it is thus or not thus; (2) to agree that it corresponds and is not opposed to the existence of the thing externally; (3) to know that it corresponds to it; and (4) that it is

20 See his *Epitome of the Posterior Analytics*, Chapter 1, pp. 20.11– 15.

not possible that it not correspond to it or that it be opposed to it; and, further, (5) that there does not exist anything opposed to it at any time; (6) and that all of this does not happen accidentally, but essentially.²¹

Deborah Black has, in the English-speaking world at least, been the foremost interpreter of this text. She has identified a number of different, interesting features of this account (although her interpretation is coherent with the received interpretation on the putative primacy of philosophy over theology). The three most important features I think she has identified are explained briefly below under the headings of: (1) the Gradability of Certainty; (2) the Internalist-Externalist Tension; and (3) the Superfluity of the Sixth Condition.

(1) *The Gradability of Certainty*

Black has characterised al-Fārābī's central contribution to be the idea that there is a gradability of certainty, such that 'forms of certainty exist but are not absolute'.²² This idea, with which I very much agree, is that one can still maintain a level of warranted certainty even when one is not absolutely certain. I think this sort of 'neo-pyrrhonist' position is extremely fruitful and helps steer an excellent middle course between scepticism and infallibilism, which even helps resolve many issues in political philosophy.²³ What I think she misses is that he has here laid the foundation for us to realise that the philosopher's state of certainty is to the prophet's state of certainty what the 'ordinary' human's is to the philosopher's. Black is emphatic that the gradability of certainty does not undermine the overall position I call Islamic Moderate Evidentialism, nor its attendant idea that only philosophy, and not theology, can yield certainty. Here is Black:

The main result of [his] reflections seems to have been that our everyday, pre-philosophical intuitions about knowledge and certitude are not entirely groundless. This is not to say that Farabi intended in any way to rehabilitate or legitimize the epistemic role of those forms of knowledge he would have identified as dialectical, rhetorical, or poetic, at least not for the philosophers as such. Farabi remains an epistemological elitist, like most of the philosophers in his tradition.²⁴

21 Al-Fārābī, *Sharāʾiṭ al-yaqīn*, p. 17.

22 Black, 'Knowledge (*ʿilm*) and Certitude (*yaqīn*) in Al-Fārābī's Epistemology', p. 36.

23 Booth, *Islamic Philosophy and the Ethics of Belief*, pp. 84–86.

24 Black, 'Knowledge (*ʿilm*) and Certitude (*yaqīn*) in Al-Fārābī's Epistemology', p. 35.

I will shortly attempt to present a slightly alternative picture to this – one where proper certainty cannot be achieved where there exists no unity of the theoretical virtues with the more practical virtues (as executed in dialectical and rhetorical reasoning).

(2) *The Internalist-Externalist Tension*

According to Black, there exists a central tension in al-Fārābī's account between what is called in contemporary epistemology a K-K condition (an 'internalist', knowing that one knows condition; see condition 3 above) and a certain externalism, where knowing how or whether one knows first principles is not required. Black has thought that conditions 4 and 5 are externalist since the subject is not required to know that they obtain so long as they do obtain. About this tension, Black has said:

This tension is perhaps one of the most intractable within the Farabian theory, and one that is difficult to resolve without abandoning some fundamental tenet of Aristotelian epistemology. It is a tension that, together with their many insights and innovations, Farabi's logical treatises were to bequeath to the later *Falasifa* for whom he was the *Second Teacher*.²⁵

As regards our knowledge of first principles (and why his account is a kind of externalist one), Black has drawn particularly on his *Epitome of the Posterior Analytics*:

What Farabi does say is that we have no conscious awareness of when we acquired knowledge of these intelligibles, and we can recall no time when we did not know them [...] Farabi goes on to insist that the question of their origin is of no concern to the logician.²⁶

And she has cited the following passage from al-Fārābī to corroborate her view:

... the fact that we are ignorant of the manner of their attainment does not cause our certainty in them to cease, nor does it diminish or impede us from composing a syllogism from them which causes certainty for us as a necessary entailment from them.²⁷

25 Black, 'Knowledge (*ilm*) and Certitude (*yaqīn*) in Al-Fārābī's Epistemology', p. 36.

26 Black, 'Knowledge (*ilm*) and Certitude (*yaqīn*) in Al-Fārābī's Epistemology', p. 30.

27 Al-Fārābī, *Epitome of the Posterior Analytics*, pp. 23.4–8.

My own view, which I will explain shortly, is that al-Fārābī thinks that most of us on our own, individually, will be ignorant of how we attain first principles and so will fall short of absolute certainty. This is how he can resolve the tension: working on our own, we cannot meet the K-K requirement for absolute certainty but – consistent with the quote above – this does not mean that we cannot achieve absolute certainty, since we can achieve it working as a collective. Absolute certainty, I think, is meant to be reserved solely for the prophet individually (or, at times, when the human collective is working in proper harmony). I think that this is the purpose of his final condition, which is important on my account.²⁸

(3) *The Superfluity of the Sixth Condition*

Black has considered that the kind of accidentality that the sixth condition is meant to rule out has already been ruled out by the other conditions (especially the third). As she has put it: ‘... it seems we must conclude that Farabi’s sixth condition is superfluous, and that it ultimately collapses into the other conditions, in particular the third’.²⁹ However, I think that the accidentality that condition 3 (what Black calls the ‘knowledge condition’) rules out is of a kind different from the accidentality that is meant to be ruled out by the final condition. I think this final condition is meant to rule out what contemporary epistemologists call ‘evidential luck’ (luck that one has evidence), which they distinguish from ‘veritic luck’ (luck that S’s belief that p is true given S’s evidence). The contemporary consensus is that evidential luck, but not veritic, is compatible with knowledge. Al-Fārābī may agree with this, but I think he wants to insist instead that absolute certainty is incompatible even with evidential luck. This point is directly related to what Black thinks is a ‘tension’ between the internalist and externalist requirements in al-Fārābī account – for it is true that we do not know how we come to intuit first principles such as the law of non-contradiction, and what it is that makes our intuitions (the working of *noûs*) on such things reliable. It is this that in a way makes foundationalism appealing – at some point we just run out of explanation and hit ‘bedrock’. But there is already a

28 Further textual evidence for the claim that we can never be certain without qualification can be found in his *Selected Aphorisms* where he tells us that human practical wisdom will always be incomplete since it gains in knowledge through experience, of which we can always have more. For discussion, see Parens, *Metaphysics as Rhetoric*, and Parens, *An Islamic Philosophy of Virtuous Religions*, where he has spoken of his ‘persistent shattering of our hopes for certainty’ (p. 118). In his *Philosophy of Aristotle*, al-Fārābī ended the discussion by explicitly telling us that he, his peers and all of us will only ever come to have an incomplete knowledge of the theoretical matters raised in that text. I owe this point to Glaston, ‘Absolute Certainty and Human Understanding’.

29 Black, ‘Knowledge (*ilm*) and Certitude (*yaqīn*) in Al-Fārābī’s Epistemology’, p. 22.

tension here in Aristotle's definition of demonstration. His requirement for the middle terms of a syllogism to be explanatory (and so to involve understanding) looks at odds with our having a genuine grasp of first principles that does not involve an understanding of how it is that we come to know them. This is relevant to the question of whether there is evidential luck – our having the (reliable) evidence from rational intuition of first principles looks overly accidental without this concomitant understanding.

I think al-Fārābī's account of certainty here, in fact, ingeniously resolves the tension rather than introducing one into Aristotelian epistemology. He thinks that, in order to satisfy conditions 1 to 5, we need not have ruled out such evidential luck – to require that would lead to severe scepticism. The K-K condition which he stipulates, as in modern epistemology, requires the subject simply to know that one has evidence, not to understand why and how one has such evidence. That seems to be reasonable in ordinary cases of evidence, but when we are talking about our direct acquaintance with first principles – which looks mysterious – the requirement that we understand it does not look so unreasonable, especially if we are trying to define an ideal state of perfect certainty, as he is trying to do.

However, this raises the following question: how could anyone possibly meet this requirement? I think that, while al-Fārābī does think the ordinary mortal can meet it to some extent, he resorts to Aristotle's *De Anima* where he thinks such an account is extant. But ultimately that account relies on the workings of the Active Intellect, which each of us, individually, cannot hope to grasp *in toto*. This is where his account of prophecy becomes most relevant. For recall that, for al-Fārābī, the prophet's special faculty of imagination enables him to grasp all the intelligibles at once ('for all the necessary propositions are conformed with one another'),³⁰ and this is part of what gives him his special rhetorical and dialectical abilities. Thus, he not only has discreet parts of knowledge of first principles but, in seeing how they are all connected, truly understands them and so understands the Active Intellect. Thus, he also presumably understands how and why there came to be a need for there to be prophet and why then he has the evidence that he has. This is of a piece with al-Fārābī's Neoplatonism, where the further up in the emanationist chain one goes, the more unity one finds (until one arrives at that being which is defined by its oneness, God – that is, 'The First'). Thus, for al-Fārābī, especially in his *The Attainment of Happiness*, we find human felicity defined in terms of grasping not just all the intelligibles but grasping how they are intimately connected. Even Peter Adamson (a major proponent of the received view) has conceded this:

30 Al-Fārābī, *Conditions of Certitude*, p. 100.6.

So now we know what al-Farabi would like us to do: fully realise our potential for knowledge by working our way up from familiar things to genuinely primary things, and grasping all the sciences as one interlocking system.³¹

Philosophy and Theology in Harmony

As mentioned, al-Fārābī's Neoplatonism brings to the Aristotelian account of demonstration the idea that the more we see how things are interconnected, the better we get to know them. One has to then presume that this will be true of the virtues, too, such that the further up in the chain of emanation we go, the more unity of the virtues we find.³² Therefore, the prophet's more perfect state of certainty comes together with a state where the virtues are more unified.³³ The virtues that make him the ideal political leader that we discussed – the capacity for rhetoric, dialectics, poetics – are unified. It is this unification that grants him his unique state of certainty, where he, unlike us, understands the why of the necessary propositions. As so only he, about the necessary propositions, meets this demand that al-Fārābī sets out:

... all demonstration proceeding from its principles combine two things – I mean they give an account of the thing's existence and of why it exists: all of them are demonstrations of both that the thing is and why it is.³⁴

Thus, I think we need to slightly amend Black's previously quoted claim:

This is not to say that Farabi intended in any way to rehabilitate or legitimize the epistemic role of those forms of knowledge he would have identified as dialectical, rhetorical, or poetic, at least not for the philosophers as such.

31 Adamson, *Philosophy in the Islamic World*, p. 67.

32 The kinds of virtues he has in mind are made clear in passages such as these: 'The human things through which nations and citizens of cities attain earthly happiness in this life and supreme happiness in the life beyond are of four kinds: theoretical virtues, deliberative virtues, moral virtues, and practical arts'; al-Fārābī, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 13.

33 'Therefore the prince occupies his place by nature and not merely by will [...] This being the case, the theoretical virtue, the highest deliberative virtue, the highest moral virtue, and the highest practical art are realised in those equipped for them by nature: that is, in those who possess superior natures with very great potentialities'; al-Fārābī, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 34.

34 Al-Fārābī, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 19.

The prophet, whom al-Fārābī often describes as a philosopher, has a perfected state of certainty that is a composite of dialectical, rhetorical and poetic forms of knowledge as well as those identified as demonstrative. While it is true that al-Fārābī does not wish to rehabilitate the epistemic role of the more practical forms of knowledge as modes of knowledge working alone, my interpretation does very much complicate the traditional picture of what he thinks about the relationship between philosopher and theologian, and between reason and religion. First of all, his solution to the epistemic uniqueness problem gains a new (and richer) dimension under this interpretation. What is different about prophetic and non-prophetic knowledge is the mode in which their objects are grasped. The prophet knows no different propositions than any other human can independently come to know, but he understands them better than any human (because he can grasp them all together). Thus, one can test the legitimacy of prophecy against reason, without rendering the former obsolete – everything in it can be individually independently verified, but it contains a vision of how the fundamental truths of the world hang together, which is beyond any other human capacity. Thus, while prophecy does contain a pedagogical function, it is not through it alone that it is epistemically unique.

This means, second, that neither the philosopher nor the theologian (thought of as someone skilled in dialectics, rhetoric and poetics *via* the use of the faculty of the imagination) can attain absolute certainty. This is because neither of them, alone, can attain such a holistic understanding. While it may be true that philosophical knowledge – in dealing with necessary and timeless propositions – may get the philosopher to a level of certainty above that of the theologian, each alone cannot attain absolute certainty.³⁵ Therefore, the difference between them cannot be about which of the two can attain this. I think al-Fārābī's ultimate point is that, to attain full certainty, the philosopher and theologian need to work together: the faculty of *noûs* needs to work with the faculty of the imagination. I think this is made clear in his more political writings when he tells us that the prophet's state of perfection (where the virtues are unified, itself imitating 'the First') should be emulated like the different parts of a state working together in harmony:

Those which are from the very outset provided with all the essentials of their existence are made to imitate the First (Cause) and its

35 'Furthermore it will become evident to him in this science that each man achieves only a portion of that perfection, and what he achieves of this portion varies in its extent, for an isolated individual cannot achieve all the perfections by himself and without the aid of many other individuals. It is the innate disposition of every man to join another human being or other men in the labor they ought to perform: this is the condition of every single man'; al-Fārābī, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 23.

aim from their very outset, and hence enjoy eternal bliss and hold the highest ranks; but those which are not provided from the outset with all the essentials of their existence, are provided with a faculty by which they move toward the expected attainment of those essentials and will then be able to follow the aim of the First (Cause). The excellent city ought to be arranged in the same way: all its parts ought to imitate in their actions the aim of their first ruler according to their rank.³⁶

It is thus only when the philosopher and theologian work together that we can attain proper happiness in this world by fully realising our potential for full-on, absolute certainty.³⁷ Such an account is not as elitist or disparaging against the theologians as the received view would have it. But what about the textual evidence that supports the received view? In the next section, I show how the interpretation just canvassed can manage it.

Another Way of Reading the Textual Evidence

To recapitulate, recall the four reasons I presented for the traditional interpretation of al-Fārābī's take on philosophy *versus* theology:

1. What he says about Aristotle's idea of metaphysics as first philosophy.
2. Explicit remarks made about the inferiority of religion in his *The Book of Religion*.
3. Remarks he makes in a political context about happiness being unavailable to those who do not live in a city run by philosophers (happiness being knowledge).
4. An unappreciative account of *kalām* given his *The Enumeration of the Sciences*.

Given the discussion in the last section, let me start with addressing (3). I think the remarks about the city being run by philosophers are extremely misleading in that they may lead us to believe that he is talking about philosophers in a solely secular sense. It is rather uncontroversial that he thinks that, in the ideal city, the prophet is the ideal political leader. And he is explicit that the prophet is, among other things, a philosopher: 'So let it be clear to you that the idea of the Philosopher, Supreme Ruler,

36 Al-Fārābī, *The Perfect State*, p. 239.

37 In this specific sense, then, I think that Mahdi in his *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* is right to think that al-Fārābī aims to deny the distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge.

Prince, Legislator, and *Imam* is but a single idea'.³⁸ He is instructing us here that the idea of a philosopher in the context of political leadership is not to be taken in the Platonic sense – since that sense is divorced from the idea of an imam. Plato himself had advocated for the need of rhetoric to ensure the harmony of the *polis*, but it is unclear whether his philosopher, skilled only in *theoria* can really be the best person to dispatch the noble myths which Plato himself thinks are necessary. Al-Fārābī looks here to be improving on Plato's vision, with an amended conception of 'the philosopher' as someone in whom all the virtues are unified. This unification of the virtues allows him to attain a perfect state of certainty and thus have perfect powers of persuasion (using dialectics, rhetoric, poetics). It is true that the pressing political question for al-Fārābī concerns what we are to do, politically, when we live in a time where there is no prophet (namely, for the vast majority of humankind).³⁹ Here again he is clear that we are to attempt to emulate as much as we can the state of the prophet – that is, a state wherein the virtues are unified. But since in the state of unified perfection of the prophet the virtues are not in any hierarchy, it is not reason in the harmonious individual human soul that governs the other parts as *per* in Plato. Rather, it is the imaginative faculty in the prophet that allows him to grasp all the intelligibles at once and, therefore, to understand them. We can then reasonably infer from this that, when there is no prophet, it is not automatically the philosophers (*qua* non-prophets) who should rule and ensure that we are happy. Rather, human happiness is achieved when our virtues, dispersed and distributed among us, are put together again – and we need to work together as a collective to achieve this. This is what he means with his claim about humans not being able to be happy outside of a collective.⁴⁰

This is related, I think, to the answer with respect to point (1). The ultimate epistemic state for al-Fārābī is absolute certainty. It is only when we reach this state that we fully realise our cognitive potential. Yet, in order to do this we need to apprehend all the intelligibles *qua* 'part of an interlocking system' (*pace* Adamson), and to do this we need the practical and rhetorical ability given through the imagination. Thus, while it is true that

38 Al-Fārābī, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 47.

39 This point is extremely well made by Khalidi, 'Al-Fārābī on the Democratic City'.

40 I also think it is false, *pace* Adamson, that al-Fārābī thinks in *The Attainment of Happiness* that every individual's ultimate happiness consists in grasping intelligibles. The warrior, he tells us, does not find ultimate happiness here: 'Man's specific perfection is called *supreme happiness* and to each man according to his rank in the order of humanity, belongs the specific supreme happiness pertaining to his kind of man. The warrior who pursues this purpose is the just warrior, and the art of war that pursues this purpose is the just and virtuous art of war'; al-Fārābī, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 37.

first philosophy involves the study of more than just God, such that it is not merely theology, it is also of a different kind of philosophy for al-Fārābī than that envisaged by Plato and Aristotle. It is a fusion of theology-rhetoric-dialectics-poetics and that kind of ‘traditional’ philosophy (where we merely arrive at theoretical knowledge of necessary propositions as individuals, through a demonstrative proof).

With this in mind, his remarks about the inferiority of religion in his *The Book of Religion* (as *per* point 2 above) should then not be taken to denote any kind of substantive inferiority. Rather, the point he makes in such passages is merely formal when we conceive of the discipline of theology as the discipline that allows us to attain understanding as well as knowledge. That is, we cannot understand things that we do not know – without knowledge, the understanding would be blind. We can take that to be the meaning behind the remark that ‘the demonstrative proofs of what is assumed in it without demonstrative proofs occur in that science’. The ‘science’ of the understanding assumes that things that are the object of the understanding are known (so are the subject of demonstrative proof), and it cannot itself give us such proofs. It is only in that sense that theology is ‘subordinate’ to philosophy. Philosophy can lead us to knowledge of individual propositions and do so without theology – but in order for us to attain full certainty, we will require both. Philosophy working on its own would be ‘a mutilated philosophy’:

When the theoretical sciences are isolated and their possessor does not have the faculty for exploiting them for the benefit of others, they are defective philosophy. To be a truly perfect philosopher one has to possess both the theoretical sciences and the faculty for exploiting them for the benefit of all others . . .⁴¹

Finally, it looks like the account of *kalām* that is offered in the *Enumeration of the Sciences* is merely a descriptive and not a normative account. That is, al-Fārābī is telling us what as a matter of historical fact (in his view) were the practises of the Mu‘tazila during his time. What he is ultimately getting at, I think, is that they think they can carry out their enterprise alone, without the need for philosophy, and that this really amounts to *taqlīd*. But while philosophy can function to some degree more autonomously, in the final analysis so, too, it would be *taqlīd* for it to operate alone, since it would be to act on mere knowledge without understanding. That may be good enough for us to simply get by in this world, but it is not good enough to secure ultimate happiness, in this life or the next.

41 Al-Fārābī, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 43.

Conclusion

I have tried to argue that al-Fārābī's view about the relationship between philosophy and theology is a less combative and more collaborative one than has hitherto been proposed. In the account which I have sketched, however, one may wonder whether the notion of theology he puts on the table is the right conception of theology. This is a worry aside from the very broad conception of 'theology' that I have employed in this chapter – as the thing that generates belief solely *via* a study of scripture or immersion in religion. For al-Fārābī, under this interpretation, what makes scripture epistemically unique is grounded in how the prophet understands the knowledge that is available to humanity. While we might prove prophecy in that it contains verifiable knowledge, the image of how all that knowledge hangs together is beyond any single one of us. One might then wonder whether that means al-Fārābī has obviated the possibility of rational choice between that prophetic vision of the world, and a rival one that employs the same truths but differently understood and configured – perhaps a 'scientistic' world view? Yet, in a way that is the whole point behind his scepticism about human absolute certainty: as individuals, we can no more be fully certain about a scientistic world view than we can about any other (provided each is based on verifiable truth). The measure of these world views will then lie in something beyond verifiable truth, and to say that is already to go beyond the contemporary scientistic outlook.

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CHAPTER 2

God as an Empirical Entity: The Expanded Scope of Sense Perception in Sunnī Traditionalist Spatialism

Jon Hoover

Introduction¹

The Zaydī theologian Ibn al-Murtaḍā (d. 840/1436) in his biographical dictionary of the Muʿtazilīs relates an encounter between the eighth-century theologian Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/746) and the Samaniyya. The Samaniyya were probably a group of Buddhists, and in this story their empiricism grounds scepticism about the existence of God.² The Samaniyya ask Jahm whether he knows God by any of the five senses. Jahm replies that he does not. Hence, the Samaniyya conclude that Jahm’s God is unknown. Jahm then consults with Wāṣil ibn ‘Aṭā’ (d. 131/748–49), the putative founder of the Muʿtazilīs, and Wāṣil tells Jahm to posit a sixth source of knowledge called inference (*dalīl*). When the Samaniyya also deny that God’s existence follows from inference, Wāṣil tells Jahm to ask them how they distinguish between someone who is living and someone who is dead, and between someone who is rational and someone who is mad. The question confounds the Samaniyya, and they convert to Islam.³ Ibn al-Murtaḍā’s account happily supports the inferential foundations of Muʿtazilī *kalām* theology and the Muʿtazilī view that God is inaccessible to sense perception. Jahm gains

- 1 I am grateful to Kamaluddin Ahmed, Ramon Harvey and Safaruk Chowdhury for their incisive critiques of earlier versions of this chapter.
- 2 Xiuyuan, ‘Buddhist Thought’, has argued that the Buddhists encountered by Jahm were probably Sarvāstivādin Buddhists found in Balkh and Tirmīdh in the region of Khurāsān. I follow Xiuyuan in spelling Samaniyya with an initial vowel ‘a’ instead of ‘u’; van Ess, *Theology and Society*, vol. 2, p. 23, has written: ‘Iranian authors such as Bīrūnī or Pazdawī use the form *Shamaniyya* which is nearer to the original; the *u* in *Sumaniyya* does not seem to be justified in any way’.
- 3 Al-Murtaḍā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazila*, p. 34. The full encounter is translated in Pines, ‘A Study of the Impact of Indian, Mainly Buddhist, Thought’, pp. 184–85.

victory over the Samaniyya by demonstrating the existence of God through inference instead of sense perception.

Ash'arī and Māturīdī *kalām* theologians agree with the Mu'tazilīs that God is not accessible to the human senses. The same applies to the *falsafa* of philosophers such as Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, d. 428/1037). Knowledge of God may be found in reports of revelation or through rational inference but not by means of sense perception. The Mu'tazilīs and the philosophers prioritised rational inference. For al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935), revelation was the grounds for the obligation to reason to knowledge of God. Al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) understood revelation and rational inference to be equally probative.⁴

The religious epistemologies of the *kalām* theologians and Avicennan philosophers are intertwined with their ontologies and theologies. For all of them, God is imperceptible to the human senses, not merely because God is veiled or silent, but because God is ontologically distinct. God is not corporeal, located, or spatially extended; God is fundamentally not an empirical entity. This presents difficulty for Ash'arīs and Māturīdīs who wish to interpret the Qur'anic verse, 'Faces on that Day radiant, looking at their Lord' (Q. 75:22–23), to mean that God will be seen in the hereafter. The incorporeality of God prevents them from affirming that God will be seen in a literal sense. Thus, the vision must be interpreted to occur in a different way or 'without how' (*bi-lā kayf*) – that is, without understanding how it will occur.⁵

This chapter highlights a stream of traditionalist theology that opposes the *kalām* and Avicennan conviction that God is inaccessible to the senses. The ninth-century traditionist al-Dārimī (d. ca 281/894), the Ḥanbalī text *al-Radd 'alā al-zanādiqa wa-l-Jahmiyya* (*Refutation of the Heretics and the Jahmiyya*)⁶ attributed to Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) and the Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) ground knowledge of God in prophetic revelation transmitted from generation to generation, and, in the case of Ibn Taymiyya, rational inference as well. Revelation and inference are important for Ash'arī and Māturīdī *kalām* theologians, too, as noted above. However, these traditionalists break decisively with *kalām* by expanding the epistemic range of sense perception to include God and maintaining that God is an empirical entity located above the world in a spatial sense. While God is not audible or visible to most people in this life,

4 See the summary of these *kalām* positions in Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*, p. 265.

5 As an example, see Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*, p. 278 (for the views of al-Māturīdī on God not being a body), pp. 291–93 (God's visibility 'without how') and pp. 294–96 (God not being located).

6 Traditionalists use the term *Jahmiyya* to vilify *kalām* theologians whose views resemble those of Jahm ibn Ṣafwān. The *Jahmiyya* did not constitute a historical school of thought on its own.

some prophets and messengers have seen and heard God, and everyone will be able to see God in the hereafter. The scope of sense perception is thus far greater than what either the Samaniyya, *kalām* theologians, or Avicennan philosophers envision. It encompasses not only the physical and temporal world but also God Himself.

I call this strand of traditionalist theology ‘spatialism’ because it interprets the Qur’an and the Sunna to affirm that God is a spatially bounded existent located above the world. It differs markedly not only from *kalām* and *falsafa* but also from the anti-interpretive and non-cognitive strand of traditionalism found in the Ḥanbalī Ibn Qudāma (d. 620/1223) and earlier works such as the creed of Ghulām Khalīl (d. 275/888), often attributed to the Ḥanbalī al-Barbahārī (d. 329/941).⁷ Whereas spatialists seek to articulate their theological interpretation in dialogue with opposing views, non-cognitivists condemn all rational argument in theology and reject enquiry into the meaning of the theological content of the Qur’an and the Sunna entirely.⁸ I will now examine al-Dārimī, the *Radd* attributed to Ibn Ḥanbal, and Ibn Taymiyya in turn. While their opponents and dialogue partners vary, these traditionalists all share the spatialist theological conviction that God is an empirical entity.

Al-Dārimī

Abū Saʿīd al-Dārimī travelled widely in early life and studied with the leading traditionists of the day. He eventually settled in Herat in present-day Afghanistan and died there sometime between 280/893 and 282/895. At some point, al-Dārimī wrote a refutation of the Jahmīs called *al-Radd ‘alā al-Jahmiyya* (*The Refutation of the Jahmīs*).⁹ The book irritated an unnamed person who was sympathetic to the theologies of a Jahmī-leaning Ḥanafī scholar named Muḥammad ibn Shujā‘ al-Thaljī (d. 266/879) and the Baghdadi Ḥanafī intellectual Bishr al-Marīsī (d. 219/833), who was accused of being a Jahmī. Al-Dārimī then responded to this unnamed opponent with a second treatise called *al-Naqd ‘alā al-Marīsī* (*Refutation of al-Marīsī*).¹⁰ I will look only at this second treatise and focus particularly

7 Ibn Qudāma, *Censure*; Jarrar and Günther, *Doctrinal Instruction*, have provided a full study on the authorship of Ghulām Khalīl’s text, as well as a translation and Arabic edition.

8 For further development of the distinction between spatialism and non-cognitivism, see Hoover, ‘God Spatially Above’.

9 Al-Dārimī, *Kitāb al-radd ‘alā al-Jahmiyya*.

10 Al-Dārimī, *Naqd*. For al-Dārimī’s life and works, see pp. 45–50 in Vitestam’s introduction to al-Dārimī, *Kitāb al-radd ‘alā al-Jahmiyya*, and van Ess, *Theology and Society*, vol. 3, pp. 195–200. On al-Marīsī and al-Thaljī, see van Ess, *Theology and Society*, vol. 3, pp. 189–203, and vol. 4, pp. 249–53, respectively.

on the theological implications of its argument that God is accessible to the human senses.¹¹

Early in *Naqḍ*, al-Dārimī criticises his opponent for denying that God is perceptible by the five senses of touch, smell, taste, seeing and hearing.¹² He counters that God is in fact audible and visible, and he supports this with Qur'anic verses stating that Moses heard God and that God will be seen in the hereafter: 'God spoke directly to Moses' (Q. 4:164), and, 'Faces on that Day radiant, looking at their Lord' (Q. 75:22–23). Al-Dārimī explains further: 'God reports in His Book that Moses perceived speech from Him by means of his hearing, and this is one of the senses, according to both you and us. He is perceived in the hereafter by looking at him with the eyes, and this is the second sense'.¹³ For good measure, al-Dārimī also quotes prophetic traditions affirming that God will be seen and heard in the hereafter: 'You will see your Lord on the Day of Resurrection as you see the sun and the moon clearly; you will have no difficulty seeing Him', and 'God will speak to every one of you without a translator in between'.¹⁴

The theological ramifications of regarding God as an empirical entity become clear a little later in *Naqḍ* where al-Dārimī explains that God is spatially bounded and located like other empirical objects. Al-Dārimī attacks his Jahmī opponent for claiming 'that God has no boundary (*ḥadd*), no extremity (*ghāya*) and no limit (*niḥāya*)' and that God is not a thing (*shay*). As far as al-Dārimī is concerned, such a God is nothing at all. Al-Dārimī affirms instead that God has two boundaries. One is the boundary that only God knows. It is not to be imagined. It is simply to be believed, and knowledge of it entrusted to God. This is apparently God's upper boundary, although al-Dārimī does not say so explicitly. The second boundary, evidently God's lower boundary, is the boundary of God's place (*makān*) 'over His Throne above His heavens'.¹⁵ Al-Dārimī supports this with verses from the Qur'an such as 'The All-Merciful sat over the Throne' (Q. 20:5).¹⁶

Further along in *Naqḍ*, al-Dārimī condemns the Jahmī views that God is not over the Throne like one body over another and that God is everywhere and not in one spot (*mawḍi*) apart from another.¹⁷ Al-Dārimī avoids calling God a body, but he affirms that God is over His Throne and distinct from creation 'by a clear gap' (*bi-furja bayyina*).¹⁸ God is therefore

11 For an overview of Jahmī theological positions drawing heavily on *Naqḍ* and a few other sources, see Gimaret, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme*, pp. 27–34.

12 Al-Dārimī, *Naqḍ*, p. 152.

13 Al-Dārimī, *Naqḍ*, pp. 155–56.

14 Al-Dārimī, *Naqḍ*, pp. 156–57.

15 Al-Dārimī, *Naqḍ*, pp. 223–24.

16 Al-Dārimī, *Naqḍ*, p. 226.

17 Al-Dārimī, *Naqḍ*, pp. 437, 442.

18 Al-Dārimī, *Naqḍ*, p. 441.

indeed in one spot apart from another. This puts al-Dārimī in something of a quandary before texts affirming that God is very close to us. He quotes the Qur'anic verse, 'There is no private conversation among three but that He is the fourth . . .' (Q. 58:7), and he alludes to the verse, 'We are closer to him than the jugular vein' (Q. 50:16). For al-Dārimī, however, such texts do not mean that God is close to creatures in any sense of spatial proximity. Or, as al-Dārimī puts it more coarsely, God is not 'with everyone urinating, defecating, and copulating in their privies, toilets, and beds'. God's nearness is instead God's full knowledge of all earthly affairs. God knows, sees and hears everything 'from above the Throne'.¹⁹

Al-Dārimī's Jahmī opponent is also concerned to affirm that God is 'not contained and not encompassed'.²⁰ Al-Dārimī agrees completely that nothing surrounds or encloses God. He asserts that there is nothing with God or above God: 'He is above the Throne in the atmosphere of the upper extremity such that no other created thing is there with Him and no heaven is above Him'.²¹ There is thus nothing at all above God's upper boundary.

Al-Dārimī's view of God easily evokes worries about anthropomorphism or assimilationism (*tashbīh*) among those with *kalām* sensibilities. Al-Dārimī is aware of this, and he responds that God's attributes and names are affirmed 'without inquiring into their modality (*bi-lā takyīf*)', in accord with the Qur'anic verse, 'There is nothing like His likeness' (Q. 42:11).²² However, this does not negate the fundamentally empirical and spatial character of God's existence in al-Dārimī's theology. A God accessible to the human senses on the epistemic level is ontologically a thing of the sort that is perceptible. God is a bounded thing that can be seen and heard.

The Ḥanbalī *Radd*

The Shāfi'ī traditionist Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) expressed doubts already in the fourteenth century about the attribution of the Ḥanbalī text known as *al-Radd 'alā al-zanādiqa wa-l-Jahmiyya* to Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. Andrew McLaren has recently published a careful study of the provenance of the work, which shows that its first recension likely dates to the third quarter of the tenth century, about a century after the death of Ibn Ḥanbal.²³ This first recension provides a brief introduction and then

19 Al-Dārimī, *Naqd*, pp. 442–46 (last two quotations on p. 443).

20 Al-Dārimī, *Naqd*, p. 446.

21 Al-Dārimī, *Naqd*, p. 446.

22 Al-Dārimī, *Naqd*, pp. 301, 689.

23 McLaren, 'Ibn Ḥanbal's Refutation', has argued that a version of the text found in the earliest manuscripts, which includes a brief introduction and a refutation of the Jahmīs, is most likely the earliest recension of the text. A second recension drops the introduction of the first recension and adds a refutation of the *zanādiqa* at the beginning. A third

recounts a version of Jahm's encounter with the Samaniyya that differs substantially from that of Ibn al-Murtaḍā, which I presented at the outset of this study.

The account in the Ḥanbalī *Radd* begins with the Samaniyya challenging Jahm to debate, with the loser to enter the winner's religion. The Samaniyya ask Jahm whether he has seen, heard, smelled, touched, or sensed his God in any fashion. Jahm replies that he has not. Thus, the Samaniyya wonder how he knows about God. This leaves Jahm bewildered for forty days. Then, he comes up with an argument that, according to the Ḥanbalī *Radd*, is like the Christian contention that God is an invisible spirit who enters a creature to speak, as in the case of Jesus, Son of Mary. Jahm asks a Samanī whether he has a spirit in him. The Samanī says 'yes', and so Jahm asks the Samanī whether he has seen, heard, touched, or sensed that spirit in any way. The Samanī says 'no', and then Jahm counters: 'Likewise with God. His face is not seen. His voice is not heard. His scent is not smelled. He is invisible to the eyes. He is in no one place to the exclusion of any other'.²⁴

To this point, the Ḥanbalī *Radd* allows Jahm to get the better of the Samaniyya in debate, as in Ibn al-Murtaḍā's account, but only by appeal to an argument at home in the rival religion of Christianity. Nothing is said about the Samaniyya converting to Islam. Instead, the Ḥanbalī *Radd* condemns Jahm for building his theology on Qur'anic verses of indeterminate meaning: 'Jahm found three indeterminate (*mutashābih*) verses in the Qur'an: "There is nothing like Him" (Q. 42:11), "He is God in the Heavens and in the earth" (Q. 6:3), and "Eyes do not perceive Him, but He perceives eyes" (Q. 6:103), and he based the entirety of his theology on these verses'.²⁵ Moreover, so asserts the Ḥanbalī *Radd*, the Jahmīs adopt a kind of negative theology. Among other things, God is everywhere and not in one place apart from another. God cannot speak. God is not seen. God has no limit, and God has no body. God is, in fact, different from anything that comes to our minds. The text then has Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal declare that God is a thing (*shayʾ*). The Jahmīs reply that God is a thing unlike things, and Aḥmad retorts that a thing unlike things is nothing at all. The Jahmīs do not in fact believe in anything.²⁶

recension, for which the earliest evidence appears in the fourteenth century, includes the introduction, the refutation of the *zanādiqa* and then the refutation of the Jahmīs. Seale, *Muslim Theology*, pp. 96–125, has translated the first recension from a manuscript in the British Library. The third recension is that most often printed in modern times, as in Ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Radd*.

24 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Radd*, pp. 196–99 (quotation on p. 199); Seale, *Muslim Theology*, pp. 97–98.

25 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Radd*, pp. 205–6; Seale, *Muslim Theology*, p. 98.

26 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Radd*, pp. 207–10; Seale, *Muslim Theology*, pp. 98–99.

The Ḥanbalī *Radd* goes on to affirm that God is an empirical entity separate from the created world, much in the fashion of al-Dārimī. God will be seen in Paradise, as the Prophet said: ‘You will surely see your Lord’.²⁷ God is in heaven and above the Throne. God is not in human bodies, pigs, toilets and unclean places. Rather, ‘[God] surrounds the entirety of His creation without being in any of His creation’.²⁸ Like al-Dārimī, the Ḥanbalī *Radd* interprets the Qur’ānic verse, ‘There is no private conversation among three but that He is the fourth . . .’ (Q. 58:7), to refer to God’s knowledge, not to God’s spatial proximity.²⁹ It also interprets the verse, ‘God is with you’ (Q. 57:4), to mean that God has knowledge of our affairs or that God defends, helps and gives victory to us.³⁰ Theologians in the *kalām* tradition also interpret God’s ‘withness’ as God’s knowledge, not because God is spatially distinct from everything in the world, but because God exists in a realm ontologically distinct from considerations of space.

Ibn Taymiyya

This brings us to Ibn Taymiyya. Ibn Taymiyya upholds the same theological ontology as al-Dārimī and the Ḥanbalī *Radd*, and he agrees with them that God is audible, as when Moses heard God speak to him directly, and that God will be seen in the hereafter. Ibn Taymiyya also maintains that God is located above the world and over the Throne, far from all the filth and dirt found within the world. Moreover, the Qur’ānic verse saying that God is with us wherever we are (Q. 57:4) means that God knows us and our circumstances.³¹

What makes Ibn Taymiyya unique among spatialists is the rigour and thoroughness with which he engages not only *kalām* but also the *falsafa* of Avicenna and Averroes (Ibn Rushd, d. 595/1198). His aim is to expose errors in these intellectual currents and translate his traditionalist understanding of the Qur’an and the Sunna into the idioms of his opponents, much as one would translate the Qur’an into other languages.³² It is not possible to discuss all relevant aspects of Ibn Taymiyya’s project here, and I will instead limit myself to showing how his understanding of the human

27 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Radd*, pp. 259–62; Seale, *Muslim Theology*, pp. 112–13.

28 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Radd*, pp. 287–95, 300–1 (quotation on p. 294); Seale, *Muslim Theology*, pp. 117–18, 119.

29 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Radd*, pp. 296–99; Seale, *Muslim Theology*, p. 119.

30 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Radd*, pp. 307–8; Seale, *Muslim Theology*, pp. 120–21.

31 See Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya*, pp. 109–10, 116; and Hoover, ‘Early Mamlūk Ash’arism’, pp. 197–204. See also the extensive recent discussions of Ibn Taymiyya’s epistemology and ontology in Suleiman, *Ibn Taymiyya*, pp. 98–144, 228–73; and El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya*, pp. 227–99.

32 On Ibn Taymiyya’s theological method, see Hoover, ‘Theology as Translation’.

natural constitution or innate nature (*fiṭra*), a kind of epistemological faculty, fits together with his ontology in which God is an empirical entity. To clarify how this works, I will first examine Avicenna's notion of *fiṭra* before contrasting it with Ibn Taymiyya's.

Avicenna discusses *fiṭra* most fully in a treatment of estimative premises (*wahmiyyāt*) in the logic section of his *al-Najāh* (The Salvation).³³ For Avicenna, the human *fiṭra* consists of judgements of the intellect and the estimative faculty that cannot be doubted and that arise independently of societal beliefs and conventions. The undoubtable judgements of the intellect are true, but those of the estimative faculty are sometimes false. To make sense of this requires a diversion into Avicennan psychology.

According to Avicenna, the estimative faculty (*al-quwwa al-wahmiyya*) or estimation (*wahm*) is one of five internal senses, which – along with the five external senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell – are found in the animal soul common to both animals and humans. The inner senses process both the forms of sensible objects perceived by the external senses and the connotational attributes (*ma'ānī*) of these objects of sense. Connotational attributes include things such as pleasantness, desirability, harmfulness, friendship and hostility. These are things that the five external senses cannot perceive. Avicenna's stock example is that of a sheep perceiving a wolf. The sheep's internal sense called the 'common sense' (*hiss mushtarak*) receives the form of the wolf from the external senses, and this form is then stored in the imagination (*khayāl*). To the sheep, the wolf connotes danger, but the external senses cannot perceive this connotation. Perceiving the connotational attribute of the wolf's danger is the task of the sheep's estimative faculty. The estimation's perception of danger is direct. It is not a matter of experience. A sheep that only learns about the danger of wolves through experience may not live to put this experience to good use in later encounters with wolves. Once the estimation receives the connotational attributes, they are stored in the memory (*dhikr*). The fifth internal sense, the imaginative faculty (*mutakhayyila*) combines and separates forms and connotational attributes derived from the objects of sense. This occurs freely in dreams. Additionally, in humans, the intellect can take control of the imaginative faculty to work through problems visually in the mind. In the animal, the estimation takes control of the imaginative faculty to consider alternative courses of action, and this is as close as an animal gets to reason.³⁴

In Avicenna's scheme, the estimative faculty is limited to the sensible world. Some of its judgements are therefore incorrect because they fail to

33 Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Najāh*, pp. 98–99; trans. Ahmed, *Logic*, pp. 89–91; Ahmed has translated the section on logic in *al-Najāh* from the manuscript MS Hunt 534, Bodleian Library, Oxford, dated 466/1073; the section on logic is on folios 112r–59r.

34 McGinnis, *Avicenna*, pp. 111–16; Black, 'Estimation'.

take account of the intellect. The estimation and the intellect do agree on primary judgements such as that two bodies cannot exist in the same place at the same time. However, the estimation goes against the intellect by judging that every existent is spatially extended (*mutaḥayyiz*) and exists in a location (*jiḥa*). The estimation cannot judge otherwise because it is confined to objects of sense perception. Yet, according to Avicenna, the intellect indicates that some existents are not spatially extended, such as God and intellects. Avicenna emphasises that the estimation is particularly powerful in marginalising such truths of the intellect. Even if the intellect does show the falsehood of the estimation's judgements, the estimation persists in believing them.³⁵ As we will see shortly, Ibn Taymiyya diverges sharply from Avicenna on the veracity of the estimative faculty's judgements.

I return now to Avicenna's account of *fiṭra* in the logic section of *al-Najāh*.³⁶ Avicenna here defines the *fiṭra* as what one believes beyond the shadow of a doubt from perceiving the sensible world on its own. This perception is independent of what others think, and it comes before adoption of a particular creed or inclusion into a particular nation or political system. The judgements of the *fiṭra* do not constitute *a priori* knowledge since they arise from perceiving the world. They are rather the judgements that all human beings will form on the basis of sense perception when not subject to the influence of upbringing, education and contact with the opinions of other people.³⁷ Some judgements of the *fiṭra* are true, particularly those that derive from 'the *fiṭra* of the faculty that is called an intellect'.³⁸ The other aspect of the natural constitution, the *fiṭra* of the estimation, is the means by which the intellect gains judgements concerning the sensible realm. However, with regard to the immaterial realm, the *fiṭra* of the estimation lies – it does not tell the truth – because its epistemic remit is confined to objects of sense.³⁹

Avicenna's *fiṭra* is thus conflicted, especially when it comes to the immaterial, intelligible world. This reflects the fundamental discontinuity in Avicenna's universe between the world of sense and the intelligible world, between the material and the immaterial, and between the corporeal and the incorporeal. The *fiṭra* of the estimation stubbornly forces the immaterial and incorporeal world into the mould of what is perceptible to the senses, and it will give no ground to the *fiṭra* of the intellect because it is incapable of doing so. The *fiṭra* of the intellect can only seek to overpower

35 Black, 'Estimation', p. 232; Griffel, 'Al-Ghazālī's Use', pp. 16–17.

36 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāh*, pp. 98–99; trans. Ahmed, *Logic*, pp. 89–91.

37 Griffel, 'Al-Ghazālī's Use', pp. 19, 26, 28.

38 Ibn Sīnā, *Al-Najāh*, p. 99.

39 Ibn Sīnā, *Al-Najāh*, p. 99; trans. Ahmed, *Logic*, p. 91; see also the translation in Griffel, 'Al-Ghazālī's Use', p. 21.

the estimation and narrow the scope of its impact. Ultimately, the full truth is found only in leaving the sensible world of the estimative faculty behind.

Ibn Taymiyya's view of the *fiṭra* is not conflicted in this fashion. However, it must first be said that the *fiṭra* for Ibn Taymiyya is primarily an ethical or moral orientation. It is the natural human inclination to love and worship God. Then, beyond that, it also includes knowledge of God and the nature of reality. The *fiṭra* knows the principles of likeness and difference and logical axioms such as that a body cannot be in two places at the same time. Additionally, the *fiṭra* knows necessarily that every created thing needs a creator, and that everything originated needs an originator. Thus, there is no need for the *kalām* or philosophical proofs for God because the *fiṭra* infers directly from created things that God the Creator exists.⁴⁰

Ibn Taymiyya's notion of *fiṭra* also shares a peculiar feature with Avicenna's faculty of estimation: the epistemic range of both is limited to objects of sense. Neither Avicenna's estimative faculty nor Ibn Taymiyya's *fiṭra* has access to an incorporeal world of intellects or an incorporeal First Cause. Whereas Avicenna says that the *fiṭra* of the estimative faculty conflicts with the *fiṭra* of the intellect regarding the intelligible world, Ibn Taymiyya simply denies that the immaterial and intelligible world of Avicenna has any existence whatsoever. Ibn Taymiyya's notion of *fiṭra* does not include Avicenna's *fiṭra* of the intellect. It includes only Avicenna's *fiṭra* of the estimation. So far as Ibn Taymiyya is concerned, the incorporeal intelligible world of Avicenna does not exist, and the God that he posits as its First Cause has no existence either.

The import of Ibn Taymiyya's approach becomes clear in his large tome *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya* (*Explication of the Deceit of the Jahmiyya*), which is a refutation of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 606/1210) *Ta'sīs al-taqdīs* (*Establishing Sanctification*).⁴¹ In *Ta'sīs al-taqdīs*, al-Rāzī accuses Ḥanbalī and Karrāmī theologians of corporealism in God's attributes, and he argues to the contrary that God is incorporeal, not subject to spatial extension and not perceptible by the human senses. Al-Rāzī explains that the estimation (*wahm*) and the imagination (*khayāl*) 'exercise their functions only in objects of sense perception',⁴² and that they therefore cannot perceive God, God's attributes and God's acts.⁴³

40 Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, pp. 40–44. Recent discussions of Ibn Taymiyya's views on *fiṭra* include El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya*, pp. 260–76; Vasalou, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics*, pp. 60–77 and *passim*; and Anjum, *Politics and Community*, pp. 215–27. Turner, 'An Islamic Account', has put Ibn Taymiyya's notion of *fiṭra* into dialogue with the philosopher Alvin Plantinga.

41 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān*; al-Rāzī, *Ta'sīs al-taqdīs*, also known as *Asās al-taqdīs*.

42 Al-Rāzī, *Ta'sīs*, p. 48.

43 Al-Rāzī, *Ta'sīs*, pp. 52–54.

In *Bayān*, Ibn Taymiyya refutes al-Rāzī at length on both rational and textual grounds.⁴⁴ Here I will mention only what is relevant to *fiṭra*. Al-Rāzī says that God is neither distinct from the world nor dwelling in the world so as to exonerate God of spatial extension and location. Ibn Taymiyya maintains to the contrary that the *fiṭra* cannot affirm the existence of something that is neither inside the world nor outside of it. To the *fiṭra*, something that is neither inside the world nor outside of it simply does not exist at all.⁴⁵ Instead, the *fiṭra* knows necessarily that God is above the world,⁴⁶ and the *fiṭra* does not deny that the Creator is a body (*jism*).⁴⁷

Yet even though the *fiṭra* does not deny that God has a body, Ibn Taymiyya is reticent to affirm a body of God explicitly because the Qur'an, the Sunna and the Salaf (that is, the early Muslims) do not speak of God using that term. Ibn Taymiyya does however affirm that God is accessible to the human senses, and he traces this to the Salaf as well: 'The generality of the Salaf and those who affirm [God's] attributes maintain that God can be witnessed, seen and sensed'.⁴⁸ Ibn Taymiyya notes that some of the messengers have heard and seen God in this life,⁴⁹ and he states that God will be seen in the hereafter.⁵⁰

Moreover, Ibn Taymiyya observes that the faculties of estimation and imagination predominate in human beings when it comes to theological matters. Avicenna and the philosophical tradition would agree but then posit a higher incorporeal reality which those with more powerful intellects can access. Ibn Taymiyya, however, turns this elitism on its head. He argues that, if indeed the estimation and imagination were wrong, then the Sharī'a would have negated them. The Lawmaker would have indicated clearly that God is very different from how we imagine Him to be. Yet, the Lawmaker has not said this.⁵¹ Ibn Taymiyya also places the intellect (*ʿaql*) on the same epistemological level as the estimation and the imagination. Al-Rāzī claims that the human estimation and imagination cannot know God, but Ibn Taymiyya responds that this is equivalent to saying that the human intellect cannot know God either.⁵²

44 For al-Rāzī's rational arguments, as well as Ibn Taymiyya's responses, see Hoover, 'God Spatially Above', pp. 653–65.

45 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān*, vol. 1, p. 333; see also vol. 2, pp. 294–95, 304, 315.

46 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān*, vol. 1, p. 54; see also vol. 3, p. 509.

47 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān*, vol. 1, p. 359.

48 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān*, vol. 3, p. 566; see also vol. 2, p. 264.

49 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān*, vol. 2, p. 342.

50 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān*, vol. 1, pp. 227–30.

51 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān*, vol. 1, p. 436.

52 Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān*, vol. 2, p. 315; see also vol. 2, p. 318.

Conclusion

To conclude, al-Dārimī, the Ḥanbalī *Radd* and Ibn Taymiyya constitute a stream of traditionalist theology that maintains that God is an extramental sensible entity located above the heavens and over the Throne. Al-Dārimī establishes the clear outlines of spatialism in argumentation against Ḥanafī opponents whom he accuses of Jahmism. The implications of this spatialist theology become especially clear when comparing the later and more sophisticated figures of Avicenna and Ibn Taymiyya on the character of the human natural constitution (*fiṭra*). Ibn Taymiyya's notion of *fiṭra* is like the estimative faculty in Avicenna's psychology insofar as the epistemic scope of both is limited to objects of sense perception. From an Avicennan perspective, Ibn Taymiyya gives free rein to the *fiṭra* of the estimative faculty and allows it to crowd out the *fiṭra* of the intellect completely. The scope of human knowledge in Ibn Taymiyya's epistemology seems not to extend beyond that of the animal soul in Avicenna's psychology; to Avicenna, Ibn Taymiyya would have appeared entirely unaware of higher realities. This no doubt explains some of the diffidence toward Ibn Taymiyya found in some contemporary Muslim circles when it comes to theological matters. Even though Ibn Taymiyya hesitates to say explicitly that God has a body, he opens the door to theological corporealism, which to *kalām* theologians and philosophers in the Avicennan stream is sheer ignorance at best and unbelief at worst. Ibn Taymiyya and fellow spatialists of course have their retort: nothing exists but objects susceptible to sense perception, and relegating God to the intelligible world is tantamount to denying God's existence entirely. Ibn Taymiyya simply rehearses in more sophisticated form a theological conflict that goes back at least to al-Dārimī. Strikingly different visions of God's nature and God's accessibility to the human senses have stood at the core of the conflict between traditionalist spatialists, on the one hand, and *kalām* theologians and philosophers, on the other, from the early centuries of Islam.

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CHAPTER 3

The Tripartite Division of Knowledge and Belief in al-Makkī's Nourishment of the Hearts

Harith Ramli

Introduction

The philosopher O. K. Bouwsma has once compared the state of epistemology in contemporary philosophical discourse with that of people living in a closed enclosure surrounded only by thick walls and dummy doors. While they could not escape the idea that something lay beyond the walls, no amount of effort by some to push the dummy doors – or perception that there might be a chink revealing some light coming through – could convince the others that this was truly the case. D. Z. Phillips has compared this with the state of contemporary philosophy of religion:

We have encountered many dummy doors in our discussions, doors which claim to give, but cannot provide, the required knowledge of God. For all pushers and pullers at these doors, God is indeed a mystery, a reality beyond the reach of our epistemic practices. Religious mysteries are turned into epistemological mysteries. Once this transition has taken place the problem is characterised as one of showing how we in the world, inside the enclosure, can talk of God, who is outside the enclosure.¹

A far cry from the tight enclosures of twentieth-century post-Kantian philosophy of religion, the mystic Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996), writing his major work *The Nourishment of the Hearts* (*Qūt al-qulūb*) towards the end of the fourth/tenth century, was concerned not with the possibility of knowledge of God itself, but with the degree to which knowledge and faith

¹ Bouwsma, *Without Proof or Evidence*, p. 2, cited in Phillips, *Faith after Foundationalism*, pp. 255–56.

of God could be affirmed with certitude (*yaqīn*). In contrast to the hard modern doors of Bouwsma, in al-Makkī's *Qūt*, we encounter an allegory of gentle veils covering doorways. While all knowers of God share the common designation of 'believer', there is a vast difference between a believer who knows only ten aspects (*ma'ānī*) of God from behind a 'veil' and one who knows 100,000 aspects directly and unveiled.

Thus, there are three levels of belief. The first type of believer only derives his knowledge concerning the article of belief second-hand from report (*khābar*) rather than experience (*khibr*). He is like the person who is told 'so and so is at my house' and believes this. Such belief can be subjected to doubt even from the start. The second type of believer is comparable to someone who has not only been told of the presence of the other, but has been brought to her, yet only hears her voice from behind a veil. At this level, belief goes beyond mere report – it is accompanied by a piece of evidence (*dalīl*). However, as one could be mistaken by such evidence since 'voices can appear to be similar to one another', this type of belief is also subject to doubt. Al-Makkī reinforces this point by arguing that, if the person were told that the voice was not of the person they had in mind, but someone who sounded similar, the evidence involved (that is, the voice) that had brought some certainty would not be sufficient to withstand such expressed doubts. In contrast to the first two types of believers, the third is comparable to the person who sees the other sitting in the other room, with no veil between them. In such a case, the believer has ascended beyond the level of the first two types of knowledge and belief (report and evidence), and now possesses certain belief that cannot be dislodged by doubt.²

This tripartite division of knowledge and belief can be seen as a description of the ascension of the believer from the common foundations of scripture and reasoning to a direct form of knowing impervious to doubt. It can also be seen as a reflection of a hierarchy of believers, arranged respectively according to three forms of knowledge: transmitted knowledge, rational proof and mystical knowing.

Both individual and social dimensions of this tripartite division are explored in al-Makkī's work, which is considered one of the first detailed expositions of Sufism as it formed into a distinct intellectual and spiritual tradition in the fourth/tenth century. The study of epistemology in early Islamic thought has understandably focused mainly on the more explicitly philosophical traditions of *kalām* and *falsafa*, and to a lesser degree on Islamic law and Hadith study.³ However, in the competitive intellectual atmosphere of the grand inquisition of the Miḥna and its aftermath, most

2 Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, pp. 329–30.

3 An overview of epistemology in classical *kalām* and *falsafa* can be found in Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 194–239.

emerging traditions in this period found it increasingly necessary to justify their intellectual foundations, not least the emerging Sufi tradition.⁴ In this period, works such as *The Nourishment of the Hearts* attempted to ground the spiritual insights of the 'knowers of the esoteric' ('ulamā' al-bāṭin) in the learning of scholars of the exoteric sciences ('ulūm al-ẓāhir), while also defining what differentiated the two domains of knowledge from one another. In like fashion, Sufism would prove to be an important part of the synthesis between intellectual traditions of the later Islamic tradition, from the master project of intellectual and spiritual revival of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) to the mystical philosophy of the school of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240).

While al-Makkī did not formulate his intellectual system in as coherent a fashion as we would find in later Sufi works, his *Nourishment* stands at the beginning of this long-standing contribution of mystical thinkers to the intellectual traditions of Islam. In this chapter, I will explore this early effort to account for the place of mystical knowledge through the wider epistemological schema of the *Nourishment*, looking both at how knowledge is acquired at the individual level as well as its broader consequences in society.

The Individual Dimension of Knowledge and the Science of Inner Motive Powers ('ilm al-khawāṭir)

The grounding of knowledge in Sufism can be seen as part of a broader discussion on the very foundations of human consciousness. Thus, before providing us a detailed exposition of his epistemology in Chapter 31 of the *Nourishment*, al-Makkī explores, in Chapter 30, the source of our inward states of mind with the concept of the 'inner motive power' (*khāṭir*, pl. *khawāṭir*).⁵ The *khawāṭir* can be seen as similar to the idea of *phantasiai* within the Stoic tradition, or *yetzer* within the Judaic tradition. Although this concept and a related discipline of knowledge is occasionally referred to within other Sufi texts from this period, we find no detailed discussion of the *khawāṭir* until the appearance of al-Makkī's text, which to a certain extent is based on the exposition provided in the earlier works of the theologian and precursor of Sufi piety, al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857–58). Hence, a more fruitful precursory discussion of this idea should begin by exploring it within the wider context of theological discourse with which al-Muḥāsibī and al-Makkī were engaged.

4 On the *miḥnā*, see Hurvitz, 'The Miḥna as Self-Defence', pp. 93–111; Turner, 'The End of the Miḥnā', pp. 89–106; and Melchert, 'The Inquisition outside Baghdad', pp. 201–10.

5 My translation of this term is based on Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Kalām*, pp. 624–44, the first work of contemporary Western scholarship to explore this concept within its wider context of the theological disputes over human action and accountability.

The root form *kh-ṭ-r* is not Qur'anic, although a few examples can be found within the Hadith corpus that has reached us.⁶ However, it seems likely that early theological discussions of inner motive powers of the mind arose out of reflections over traditions concerning the two spirits (*lammatān*) – one encouraging the individual to good, and the other to evil.⁷ It should be recalled that the early Mu'tazila were not only theoreticians, but were concerned with ascetic piety as part of the broader milieu of what Marshall Hodgson has termed 'the pious-minded opposition' in the late Umayyad/early Abbasid period.⁸ However, as Mu'tazilism evolved into philosophical theology, concern with the impact of spiritual forces on human psychology became translated into inner cognitive mechanics understood from the broader cosmology of *kalām*. Thus, al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935–36) reports to us that, by the time of Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf (d. 227/841–42 or 235/849–50), Mu'tazilīs generally perceived the two *lammatān* as 'accidents' (*a'rāḍ*) in the mind.⁹ Nevertheless, the Mu'tazilīs disagreed among themselves over the nature and source of the *khawāṭir*, as well as how they fit within their broader concerns about the theology of free choice and divine predestination. There was some resistance to complete the depersonification of the *lammatān* of the type advocated by Abū al-Hudhayl's student, al-Nazzām (d. between 220/835 and 230/845), who rejected the idea that *khawāṭir* were the result of external forces, demonic or otherwise, proposing rather that they were latent (*kāmina*) within the human psyche.¹⁰ Al-Nazzām also

6 See examples of these in Wensinck, *Concordance*, vol. 2, p. 48. Interestingly, none of these occur in al-Makki's introduction to chapter 30 (*Qūt al-qulūb*, pp. 238–40), where he has provided a list of Qur'anic and Hadith references related to the subject.

7 The word '*lamma*' (pl. *lumam*) seems to have early on been related to the concept of insanity brought about by spirit (*jinn*) possession. The word also has a sense of 'covert visitation' and 'gathering', for which the latter is perhaps the most useful here for the translation of the term as it occurs in the hadith. See Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, p. 3012; for the hadith, see Wensinck, *Concordance*, vol. 7, p. 146: 'In the son of Adam, the Devil has one visitation and the Angel another (*inna li-al-shayṭān lamma li-ibn ādam wa-li-l-malak lamma*)'. See also the discussion of this hadith in Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Kalām*, pp. 624–28.

8 On the roots of the early Mu'tazila in the ascetic tradition, see Stroumsa, 'The Beginnings of the Mu'tazila Reconsidered', and a discussion of the 'Mu'tazilī Sufis' in van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 3, pp. 130–34. A. Kevin Reinhart has observed that '[t]o recognize the centrality of psychology in Mu'tazilī thought is important if the religious quality of their intellectual schema is to be appreciated. An epistemology usually characterized as rationalist turns out to be grounded in feeling'; Reinhart, *Before Revelation*, p. 156.

9 Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, p. 429.

10 Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, p. 429. Based on the location of this statement in the chapter, Wolfson has suggested that al-Nazzām was the first to have introduced this doctrine, which was 'adopted by Abū al-Hudhayl and [some of] the rest of the Mu'tazilites' (see Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Kalām*, p. 634; square brackets are his). Wolfson has

advocated the principle that the *khawāṭir* were necessary for establishing human moral responsibility, which his teacher and other Mu'tazilīs also rejected, fearing the implications that this would have on their absolute detachment of God from evil human acts.¹¹ The result of this disagreement might have been the formulation of a more complex psychological schema, one that went beyond the binary of good and bad *lammatān*. It took into consideration additional aspects of the human psyche such as the human intellect (*'aql*), which Abū al-Hudhayl saw as exercising moral judgement in its own right.¹²

Without going into all the specifics of the evolution of *khawāṭir* theory among the Mu'tazila, we can generally conclude that there was a shift from the original binary idea of two *lammatān* towards increased psychological and moral complexity, so that the term *khawāṭir* came to generally refer to all types of inner motive powers resulting in human action. Similar concerns were addressed by theologians outside the Mu'tazilī camp, such as the proto-Sunnī al-Muḥāsibī. With al-Muḥāsibī, we see an attempt to incorporate the idea of inner motive powers as part of his general concern with introspection (*muḥāsaba*) and the moral reform required to arrive at true fulfilment of the Law (*shar'*) and deeper connection with the divine. For al-Muḥāsibī, ensuring that one's internal actions (*a'māl al-qulūb*) are in alignment with the safeguarding of divine laws is the first duty of the individual.¹³ In order to do this, one must first investigate any *khawāṭir* instigating an action and refrain from performing such an action without first assessing its moral value. The *khawāṭir* are defined here as 'invitations of

then gone on to speculate about the possible influences of Zoroastrian, Greek and Jewish thought on al-Nazzām's theory; Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Kalām*, pp. 632–34. This reading of the *Maqālāt* is mistaken, as is the claim that Bishr b. al-Mu'tamir rejected the idea of *khawāṭir* altogether, when, in effect, he only rejected al-Nazzām's systematic account of it. It is clear from the sections in the same chapter that the opposition to al-Nazzām was not due to a purported introduction of the concept of *khawāṭir*, but due to his ascription of the *khawāṭir* of disobedience to God, rather than to the Devil. Van Ess has also briefly touched on the *khawāṭir* in the context of early Mu'tazilī debates, although in his view it seems peripheral to the development of systematic theology as a whole. See van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 3, pp. 138, 274, 412, as well as vol. 4, pp. 559–60.

11 Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, p. 429.

12 Although it is commonplace to see the Mu'tazila as rationalists, we still do not have a clear idea of the development of this 'rationalism' in their early history. See the remarks on this in Reinhart, *Before Revelation*, p. 220, n. 40, and his discussion of Abū al-Hudhayl's contribution to the theory of *'aql* (pp. 139–41).

13 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya*, pp. 82–83. Van Ess has traced al-Muḥāsibī's distinction between 'actions of the body' (*af'āl/a'māl al-jawāriḥ*) and 'actions of the heart' (*af'āl/a'māl al-qulūb*) back to Abū al-Hudhayl. See van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 4, pp. 223.

the heart to every good or evil act'.¹⁴ A distinction, therefore, could be made between more transient *khawāṭir* and the set of determined intentions (*i'tiqād*). While we are responsible for safeguarding ourselves from the former, it is only with the latter that moral responsibility properly falls into place.¹⁵ Corresponding with increasingly elaborate psychological schema as developed by other theologians of the time, al-Muḥāsibī saw five sources of *khawāṭir*: the self (*nafs*) and the Devil motivating evil actions; the intellect, angels and God directly motivating good actions.¹⁶

While the significance and long-term impact of al-Muḥāsibī on the Sufi tradition cannot be denied, it is interesting to note that his terminology and psychological schema do not appear to have been taken up by Sufis until the composition of al-Makkī's *Nourishment*. Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī (d. 380/980) dedicated a short chapter to the science of *khawāṭir* in his *Introduction to the Doctrine of the Sufis* (*al-Ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf*). But unlike al-Muḥāsibī he did not include the intellect as one of the sources of inner motivation.¹⁷ Nor does the concept of *khawāṭir* itself receive anything more than sporadic treatment in other early Sufi writings that have survived, even in the works of al-Makkī's spiritual ancestor Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896).¹⁸ Resistance among early mystics to al-Muḥāsibī's view of the intellect could be attributed to suspicion of his engagement with *kalām* theology, as many were inclined towards traditionalism. It is unclear, however, why the science of *khawāṭir* is given little attention in early Sufi sources, although one explanation could be that such works were often focused on the more advanced stages of the spiritual path, rather than aspects of basic piety and practice, as we find in al-Muḥāsibī. Nevertheless, it is only with al-Makkī's *Nourishment* that we can see the first serious attempt at developing al-Muḥāsibī's theory of the *khawāṭir*.

According to al-Makkī, the heart is the vessel containing the different *khawāṭir* that appear and, therefore, can be considered a treasure-store

14 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya*, p. 84.

15 For a description of al-Muḥāsibī's conception of *i'tiqād al-qulūb*, see al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 297–301. Here he has distinguished (pp. 297–98) between *i'tiqād* in the heart and the 'whisperings of the soul' (*waswasat al-nafs*). Therefore, while a person is not accountable for whisperings, he can be held accountable for an act he had determined to perform even if it did not occur (for example, due to death; see p. 299). In al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Ri'āya*, pp. 89–90, the word *'aqd* (treated as individual aspects of *i'tiqād*), is used to refer to the psychological acts that result from *khawāṭir* in the 'heart's mind' (*ḍamīr al-qalb*), distinguished from the *hamm* (concern, intention) that results in the physical motion and rest of bodily actions (*ḥarakāt al-jawāriḥ wa-sukūnihā*).

16 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Al-Ri'āya*, pp. 84–85.

17 Kalābādhī, *al-Ta'arruf*, pp. 104–5.

18 This term appears a number of times in the works ascribed to Sahl al-Tustarī but is used in a general and unsystematic manner. See al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, pp. 28, 43, 101, 133, 178; and al-Tustarī, *Kalām Sahl*, p. 111.

through which divine beauty and majesty are revealed.¹⁹ Al-Makkī then compares the heart to a body that possesses different parts. Two of these, the lower self (*nafs*) and the spirit (*rūḥ*), are loci (*makānān*) which become the battleground for two personalities (*shakhṣān*): the Enemy (namely, the Devil) and the Angel, drawing on two of the heart's qualities (*ʿaraḍān*):²⁰ the intellect and the passions (*hawā*). Finally, the heart also contains two lights (*nūrān*): the light of knowledge (*ʿilm*) and the light of faith (*īmān*). Al-Makkī compares the heart to a king in relation to his army, or that of a mirror in relation to the source of the reflections that shine upon it. Following this description of these different components of the heart, al-Makkī provides a more detailed description (*tafṣīl*) of the different types of *khawāṭir* that arise in the heart, of which there are six. First there are the *khawāṭir* that come from the lower self and the Enemy, which give rise to evil actions. Their counterparts which give rise to good actions are the spirit (*rūḥ*) and Angel (*malak*), respectively. In between these four, the intellect arbitrates and decides on the course of actions, sometimes siding with good *khawāṭir* and sometimes with their opposites. And finally, there are *khawāṭir* that bring about certitude (*yaqīn*), which is the result of faith and knowledge.²¹

Based on this we can see that al-Makkī modifies al-Muḥāsibī's five-fold psychological schema, assigning a more neutral role for the intellect of decision-making (in Muḥāsibī, it is only a source of good impulses). In addition to this, a more detailed picture of psychological motives is given, including the role of knowledge. While al-Muḥāsibī simply talks about inspirations from God and angels, al-Makkī provides a description of such heavenly sources of *khawāṭir* that clarifies the distinction between lights of faith and knowledge as well as degrees of certitude (*yaqīn*).

It is worth underlining here the importance of understanding knowledge as divine encounter and manifestation in al-Makkī's teaching. The heart itself is considered part of the spiritual realm, acting as the counterpart to the physical senses. It, too, contains five senses, receiving stimuli from both the earthly and spiritual realms, yielding experience (*mushāhada*) with its vision, understanding (*fahm*) with its hearing, speech (*kalām*) with its taste, knowledge (*ʿilm*) with its smell. It is through this inner fourth sense that the inborn intellect (*al-ʿaql al-gharīzī*) develops into the acquired intellect (*al-ʿaql al-muktasab*). Thus, we should understand the *khawāṭir* arising from knowledge to come not only from external sources (that is, learning

19 See al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, pp. 324–26. A detailed discussion of the heart in the *Qūt al-Qulūb* in comparison with other religious traditions can be found in Yazaki, *Islamic Mysticism and Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī*.

20 I believe that this is a more accurate reading than the way in which it appears in the printed edition: *gharaḍān*.

21 See al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, pp. 324–26.

or transmitted knowledge from others), but also internal knowledge that has already been absorbed and retained in the individual memory. However, it is the fifth inner sense of touch that brings about the sublime tearing of the heart's outer veil and the arrival at its innermost core, resulting in divine encounter (*wajd*) arising from the attainment of spiritual stations. It is here that the individual, through the purification of the body and heart, begins to become more aware of the expansion of faith that is certitude, the sixth among the *khawāṭir*.²²

Why does al-Makkī feel the need to include a sixth form of *khawāṭir* separate from the intellect to account for certain knowledge? We see that he affirms the role of the intellect in providing foundational knowledge and judgements, especially in determining moral values. Without this, human moral responsibility would not be possible. However, the intellect is restricted from true knowledge of divine oneness (*tawḥīd*):

He who looks to his intellect to affirm divine oneness, his (affirmation of) divine oneness will not save him from the Hellfire. And he whose affirmation of divine unity in this world is dependent on what is intelligible (*ma'qūl*) will not attain through it certitude (*yaqīn*).²³

And elsewhere:

There is no cognition (*tafakkur*) of divine unity (*tawḥīd*) and divine witnessing (*mushāhada*), nor is there visual perception (*ʿiṣān*) of divine allusion (*ishāra*), nor is there a cognisable order (*tartīb*) to divine power (*qudra*).²⁴

It is therefore clear that by 'certitude' al-Makkī here does not mean that which is acquired by rational reflection or learning, but something from beyond the realm of the intellect, attainable only by the spiritual elite.

The knowledge of certitude (*ʿilm al-yaqīn*) cannot be ignited in the location (*ma'dīn*, literally: mine) of the intellect, as the intellectual forms of knowledge are created (*ʿulūm al-ʿaql makhluqāt*). Nor can certitude be the product of thought (*fikr*) or the result of contemplation (*tadabbur*). Those things which are the result of thoughts (*afkār*), or whatever *khawāṭir* or forms of knowledge (*ʿulūm*) that occur through the innate disposition (*fiṭra*), are the forms of knowledge pertaining to the intellect (*ʿulūm al-ʿaql*). They are unveilings of

22 Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, p. 354.

23 Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, p. 354.

24 Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, p. 358.

the believers (*kushūf al-ʿarīfīn*), and the praiseworthy qualities among the People of the Religion (*maḥmūdāt li-ahl al-dīn*). As for the *khawāṭir* of certitude, it manifests from the eye of certitude (*ʿayn al-yaqīn*); it calls out to a servant, seeking him directly, because it is specially reserved for him.²⁵

What remains to be understood is whether the intellect and mundane types of knowledge (that is, knowledge not derived through the *khawāṭir* of certitude) have any role to play in spiritual unveilings. The passage just cited could be understood to imply that there is a strict hierarchy of knowledge in which certitude reigns supreme over intellectual forms of knowing and learning, thus potentially raising the problem of spiritual elitism and the consequent accusations of antinomianism and absolution from religious authority, which are often raised against mystics. Al-Makkī addresses this issue using the metaphor of an oil lamp to explain the relationship between the intellect, knowledge and faith that results in certitude when these aspects are combined. Faith, which is strengthened by cautious moral scrutiny (*waraʿ*) and brought to perfection through fear of God (*khawf*), is comparable to the wick which lights the lamp. Knowledge is the oil that provides it with the fuel to burn, while the intellect is the water that contains the oil and thus provides the foundation upon which the lamp can burn. The heart is, of course, the lamp itself.²⁶ Basing himself on Q. 47:19 and 11:14, al-Makkī tells us that divine unity (*tawḥīd*) is perceived only after the acquisition of knowledge. When this knowledge increases sufficiently, the believer increases in faith and is able to perceive in his witnessing (*mushāhada*) of the divine what is not known to others. Conversely, when there is a deficit in knowledge, faith is diminished, and in that reduced state of faith the believer's experience of divine oneness is veiled and any experience of witnessing is merely the result of his own imagination.²⁷

While the intellect in al-Makkī's epistemology has a restricted role, confined as it is to mundane objects of knowledge, it still plays an essential part in attaining the level of certitude required for knowledge of the divine. This is especially the case when it comes to moral reasoning, which harks back to the very early days of Islamic theology when *khawāṭir* theorists were more focused on the question of moral responsibility in which a sound intellect that can determine right from wrong is sufficient proof (*ḥujja*) for moral culpability. Yet as a mystic who has meditated on the depths of human soul, al-Makkī is also inclined towards seeing room for moral ambiguity due to the subtle ways in which spiritual forces (good and evil) can attempt

25 Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, p. 337.

26 Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, p. 328.

27 Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, pp. 328–29.

to manipulate the intellect. Overall, there is a tendency here to downplay the role of the intellect in attaining certain knowledge in favour of extra-intellectual sources, whether they be from within (certitude) or without (revealed knowledge as transmitted through scripture and prophetic narrations). Thus, al-Makkī's more complex *khawāṭir* schema builds on the views of his predecessors to allow not only for the full incorporation of mystical knowledge and spiritual insights into our understanding of the foundations of human consciousness, but also the affirmation of mundane forms of learning and scholarship in the path to attaining true knowledge of God.

The Social Dimension of Knowledge and the Science of Exposition (*ʿilm al-taḥṣīl*)

In al-Makkī's discussion of the six *khawāṭir* in Chapter 30 of the *Nourishment*, a social hierarchy is given according to which types of believers are consistently connected to the various inner motive powers. At the lowest rank are the generality (*ʿumūm*) of believers, who are still consistently attached to the *khawāṭir* coming from the lower self and the Devil, which call on them to evil actions and actions which go against religious knowledge (*ʿilm*). Next in rank are the elect (*khuṣūṣ*) from among the believers, who are consistently attached to the *khawāṭir* of the angelic forces that speak through the spirit (*rūḥ*) of the individual, calling only to good and true actions that correspond with religious knowledge. The *khawāṭir* of the intellect shared by both these ranks does not consistently lead one to good or bad actions, at times siding with the evil *khawāṭir* and at times siding with the good, contingent on the degree to which such powers have control over the heart. It is only those at the highest rank, the believers who are given connection to the *khawāṭir* of certitude, who can consistently carry out actions that are commanded by the divine, even when such knowledge is obscure to the learned scholars of religious knowledge.²⁸

Here al-Makkī makes a distinction between the scholars of exoteric learning (*al-ẓāhir*) and those who possess knowledge of the esoteric (*al-bāṭin*). This becomes a central theme in Chapter 31 of the *Nourishment*, which is concerned mainly with the general state of learning and scholarship in al-Makkī's time and the position of esoteric knowledge and unveiling within this wider intellectual context. Early on in this chapter, he provides a concise description of exoteric knowledge:

This form of knowledge is knowledge of laws and legal opinions, the knowledge of Islam. Its path is the faculty of hearing (*samʿ*), its

28 Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, pp. 325–26.

key is deduction (*istidlāl*) and its storehouse is the intellect (*‘aql*). It is recorded in books and inscribed in papers, transmitted from the old to the young through the tongues. It remains so long as Islam remains, and exists so long as the Muslims exist, because it is God’s proof (*ḥujja*) over all creation [. . .]

The Prophet has informed us regarding this knowledge, which is equipped and safeguarded on the surfaces of books. It is the external aspect of the religion (*ẓāhir al-dīn*), and ignorance and absence of it will lead to polytheism (*shirk*).²⁹

Note the re-appearance of the term ‘proof’ (*ḥujja*), which we saw earlier used in reference to the intellect and its role in affirming individual moral responsibility. Exoteric knowledge or transmitted learning here also plays the role of ‘proof’, only for creation as a whole. Thus, not only are mundane forms of knowing and learning through scholarly and intellectual means essential in their role for safeguarding the beliefs of the community, but as a ‘proof over all creation’ also serve an ultimate purpose in the wider cosmic scheme. Even though al-Makkī would go on later in the chapter (and consistently throughout his work) to advocate the view that knowledge of the esoteric acquired through certitude and those who possess it are superior to the exoteric, it is clear that the latter plays an indispensable role within his broader social epistemology.

This is due to the important role that exoteric knowledge plays in validating the belief of the common person not privy to knowledge of the esoteric. As we have seen earlier, al-Makkī employs the metaphor of the oil lamp to highlight the necessary role that knowledge plays alongside the intellect to bring the heart to a state of faith and, ultimately, certitude. Once faith has attained the sufficient conditions and increased to the level of certitude, it brings about the attainment of gnosis (*ma’rifa*). However, this does not mean that a believer who has not attained the level of certitude herself is bereft of any contact with it.

Al-Makkī makes an important distinction here between the indirect gnosis attained through *sam’* (hearing, or transmission) and the direct one through certitude. Thus, there is a difference between the simple faith of the average believer who comes into contact with the knowledge of certitude (*‘ilm al-yaqīn*) indirectly through learning and transmission, and the direct experience of the mystic attained through the eye of certitude (*‘ayn al-yaqīn*). The difference between the two lies in the mode by which they arrive at this certitude. Thus, for al-Makkī, there are two types of perception (*mushāhada*) corresponding to the exoteric and the esoteric:

29 Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, p. 406.

1. *Mushāhadat al-istidlāl* (perception based on proofs). This form of witnessing occurs after the knowledge acquired by transmission (*ma'rifat al-khabar*). Al-Makkī describes it as a form of knowledge that is transmitted through speech and teaching (*ta'līm*). This can be understood also as a second-hand form of knowledge sufficient to bring about the indirect form of certitude.
2. *Mushāhadat al-dalīl 'anhā* (perception of that which proofs themselves are based on). This direct form of perception is experienced only after the attainment of the previous form, which is based on proof. According to al-Makkī, one attains this through no medium other than divine encounter (*wajd*) through the eye of certitude.³⁰

Through this scheme, al-Makkī is able to both affirm the transcendental nature of true certitude yet also concurrently affirm the validity of non-transcendental degrees of faith insofar as they derive from the transmitted knowledge derived of those who have attained the former.

Based on this, one can draw out a more detailed explanation of the different ways in which people acquire certitude. Al-Makkī divides certitude into three levels (*maqāmāt*):

1. Certitude intermingled with doubt: al-Makkī also describes this as the certitude of rational proofs and religious sciences. He explicitly identifies it as the type of certitude associated with *kalām* theologians (*mutakallimūn*), highlighting how it increases or decreases according to the quality of reasoning or transmitted knowledge from other scholars. At best, such scholars possess an understanding closer to the truth due to their affiliation with those who possess direct sight.
2. Certitude based on affirmation and acceptance (*taṣdīq wa-l-istislām*): this form of certitude is that of average believers, described as the 'innocent' (*abrār*). While it is subject to fluctuation, varying according to the individual's level of piety, it is not subject to the doubt of the first level of certitude, since it is based firmly on transmitted knowledge (*khabar*) – that is, scripture and prophetic tradition.
3. Certitude based on direct visionary encounter (*mu'āyana*): this is the highest form, attained by the righteous and the martyrs, those who bear witness (*al-ṣiddīqūn wa-l-shuhadā*). The one who attains this is described as one with experience (*khabīr*), although his knowing does not contradict the knowledge given through transmission (*khabar*, namely, authentic religious tradition).

30 Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, pp. 379–80.

While there is arguably some ‘wobble room’ for arriving at certitude through rational proofs, this threefold division reveals al-Makkī’s own theological preference for the cautious traditionalist approach of the Ḥanbali school, rather than the rationalist approach of his contemporaries from the emerging Sunni *kalām* traditions. Of the different types of exoteric scholar in his time, he places those who engage in *kalām* at a lower level than those scholars who focus on the transmission of prophetic reports and narrations.³¹ This reflects al-Makkī’s broader historical diagnosis of a gradual decline in the state of the community after the proliferation of book learning and proliferation of *kalām* theology from the second/eighth century.³²

Al-Makkī’s preference for traditionalist scholars over the methods of rational proof in *kalām* may seem to contradict the threefold division of knowledge using the allegory of doorways, presented at the very start of this discussion. According to this, knowledge based on proofs, albeit subject to doubt, would appear superior to knowledge based on a report (*khbar*). If this is the case, then surely any effort to establish knowledge of God based on proofs, notwithstanding its limitations, should be superior to the method of simple fideism and affirmation of transmitted revelation and prophetic reports? This is where it is important to return to al-Makkī’s earlier statement on the essential nature of exoteric knowledge and its transmission. What troubles him is not so much the method of approaching God but ensuring correspondence between such exoteric learning and esoteric truths. As time passed and historical changes such as book learning brought about a significant transformation in the modes and motivations of exoteric scholarship, the harmonious correspondence between it and esoteric knowledge broke down, resulting in the appearance of distorted forms of religious scholarship and learning.

This leads us to a final question regarding al-Makkī’s epistemology: short of attaining direct knowledge based on certitude, how can one find the correspondence between exoteric and esoteric knowledge. In other words, if the mundane (that is, the intellect and transmitted knowledge) cannot attain knowledge of the transcendent, how can we be sure that faith sits on sound foundations and that we are headed in the right direction towards certitude? Is the average person untouched by direct divine encounter, like Bouwsma, standing before hard impenetrable doors, seeing God as a divine mystery ‘beyond the reach of our epistemic practices’? A first possible solution to this problem is to affirm the strict hierarchy between the

31 Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, pp. 408–9.

32 Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, pp. 440–42. It is important to note that, in this period, what constitutes ‘*kalām*’ is still fluid. Elsewhere, I have argued that, in some ways, al-Makkī’s spiritual forbears, the Sālimiyya of Basra, could be seen as practicing a form of mystical *kalām*. See Bin Ramli, ‘Abū Ṭalib al-Makkī and the Sālimiyyah’.

exoteric and esoteric, which places the average believer in the problematic position of merely submitting to those who claim to possess knowledge of the latter. Al-Makkī appears to reject this solution. Among the more noticeable aspects of his general critique of different claims to knowledge in his time is his attack on certain quarters of the evolving mystical tradition in Islam: those who expressed esoteric truths through the medium of mystical ecstatic utterances (*shaṭaḥāt*).³³ He contends that such utterances do more harm than good, as they are prone to be misunderstood by the common believer. Instead, he advocates a method of bridging the gap between the mundane/exoteric and the transcendent/esoteric through the employment of scholarly language based on scripture and prophetic tradition. While intellectual means cannot attain the reality of divine oneness or the direct witnessing of divine realities, he argues that it is necessary for there to be a 'science of elucidation' (*ilm al-tafṣīl*):

[It is] based on the language of the Revealed Law (*lisān al-sharʿ*), aimed at manifesting the paths (*ṭuruq*), casting light on the ways (*subul*), guiding the wayfarers (*sālikīn*), and laying down a regimen for worshippers (*ʿāmilīn*), 'so that those who were to die might die after seeing a clear proof, and so that those who were to live might live after seeing a clear proof' (Q. 8:42). And God always prevails in His purpose (Q. 12:21).³⁴

The science of *tafṣīl*, therefore, like the divine signs in creation, lays down a path to divine reality, yet is distinct from it. It guides one to it, rather than constitutes the reality itself. To borrow a well-known expression today, 'the map is not the territory' and – perhaps more appropriately for a text titled *The Nourishment of Hearts* – 'the menu is not the meal'.³⁵ Essentially, what al-Makkī is advocating here is not simply the priority of the transcendent over the mundane, but a 'science' of the spiritual path that can bridge the gap between the two. From this perspective, al-Makkī's earlier statement about the cosmic significant of exoteric knowledge comes to light. Without

33 Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, p. 408. For an overview of mystical utterances in Islam, see Ernst, *Word of Ecstasy*. Interestingly, the few times when the term 'Sufi' appears in the *Nourishment*, it is associated with such forms of spiritual discourse.

34 Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, p. 358.

35 Smith, *Map is Not Territory*. The expression apparently goes back to Korzybski, 'A Non-Aristotelian System and Its Necessity for Rigour in Mathematics and Physics'. The expression 'the menu is not the meal' is often attributed to the populariser of Buddhism, Alan Watts. Cf. Wilson, *Final Secret of the Illuminati*, p. 11. I have traced this expression (perfectly suited to the *Qūt*) as far back as a 1944 work by Anthony Gordon Melvin. See Melvin, *Teaching*, p. 61.

it, no map can be drawn, no menu can be written, and no bridge can be built. Significantly, this also enables the validation of the belief of the common believer, insofar as it faithfully adheres to exoteric knowledge, while also affirming the role of scholars and teachers of such knowledge, as well as the role of spiritual masters and guides who play the role of bridging the gap between such knowledge and esoteric truths.

Instead of Bouwsma's impenetrable hard doors, what we encounter in al-Makkī's *Nourishment* are gentle liminal veils that allow for the journey between the mundane and the transcendent. The gap between the two realms makes the case for the development of a science of the mystical path.

Conclusion

The crystallisation of the Sufi tradition during the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries can be seen as part of the broader consolidation of scholarly disciplines during this period, from jurisprudence, law, theology and philosophy to the scriptural sciences of the Qur'an and Hadith.³⁶ Amidst the competition cutting across sectarian and intellectual divides, Sufi masters put forward their own distinctive paradigms of knowledge, while also attempting to position themselves *vis-à-vis* other disciplines of learning. A necessary aspect was to identify what was distinctive and essential to the path of Sufi learning, for the purposes of laying down the foundations for spiritual seekers as well as to defend the legitimacy of these foundations against outside criticism. Above and beyond this, Sufi theorists – to differing degrees – also presented the foundations of Sufi knowledge as essential and primary to the belief and practice of all Muslims. Among the pioneers of Sufism, we can detect traces of differing approaches to the following question: in what way is Sufi knowing or knowledge related to knowledge within the Islamic tradition as a whole?

Observing the intellectual turbulence of the period, al-Muḥāsibī accounted for the existence of diverse sects by the vast differences between those who titled themselves 'knowers' (*'ulamā'*). Those 'knowers of the Hereafter' who truly deserved this designation were few and far between, while the vast majority of claimants fell short due to their lack of piety, which in the worst case manifested itself as pretension.³⁷ Al-Muḥāsibī's more careful approach can be seen against the background of the Miḥna, or theological inquisition, and the consequent formation of a 'Sunnī' consensus across the Abbasid Caliphate. While his focus on inner psychology anticipates some of the key aspects of what later became the Sufi tradition, al-Muḥāsibī

36 Karamustafa, *Sufism*, pp. 83–113.

37 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 61–63.

seems less concerned with forming a distinctive mode of piety than utilising the narrative of lost piety in order to call for an intellectual and social regeneration of the *umma*. This can be contrasted to the approach seen in statements by Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 245/859–60), who adopted a bolder distinction between spiritually advanced ‘knowers’ (*ʿarifīn*) and scholars, in which the former are considered superior to the latter.³⁸ The great founder of the Sufi tradition of Baghdad, Junayd (d. 298/910), adopted a mid-way position in which the uncompromising stance of Miṣrī was maintained behind a carefully tended garden of oblique technical language and efforts to win over scholastics to the side of mystics.

Al-Makkī’s *Nourishment*, which was composed during the latter half of the fourth/tenth century, employs the more straightforward scholarly language of al-Muḥāsibī to articulate a position that appears closer to al-Miṣrī’s. Unlike most other Sufi authors of the period (who were perhaps adopting the cautiousness of Junayd), he takes a more unambiguous position on the superiority of certitude over all other forms of knowledge, and of the inward and esoteric (*bāṭin*) over the outward and exoteric (*ẓāhir*). Yet, he also advocates moral and social reform through the affirmation of the role of the sciences of Islamic tradition, much in the same way as al-Muḥāsibī before him. Several generations later, this kind of approach would result in al-Ghazālī’s more thoroughly systematic *Revival of the Religious Sciences*.

It is important to recognise that al-Makkī wrote at a time when disciplinary and sectarian boundaries were still establishing themselves. Thus, the *Nourishment* itself moves rather fluidly between different exoteric sciences and often articulates its ‘science of elucidation’, in a way that seems less technical and systematic than even some of the works of al-Makkī’s near contemporaries. In fact, most noteworthy is his avoidance of the use of term ‘Sufi’ itself, reserved mainly for those practitioners of ecstatic utterances whom he disdained. It is tempting, especially given his inclinations towards Ḥanbalī traditionalism, to conclude that, in comparison with other mystical authors of his time and al-Ghazālī a century later, al-Makkī was more of a fideist. However, this would be missing the forest for the trees. For him, the issue was not so much the employment of a particular method in exoteric knowledge (although he had his preferences) but ensuring that there was correspondence between it and the esoteric truths attained through certitude. Witnessing events from the liminal world of the grave, al-Makkī might have applauded al-Ghazālī’s efforts to strengthen the foundations of the intellectual disciplines and harmonise the exoteric and the esoteric religious sciences.

38 Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, p. 32. See also John Renard, *Knowledge of God*, p. 20.

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PART II

Epistemological Sources in *Kalām*: Perception, Reason and Testimony

CHAPTER 4

How to Know? Debating Sense Experience in Classical Kalām

Hannah C. Erlwein

Introduction¹

Much of what the science of *kalām* was concerned with were entities that the *mutakallimūn* (Islamic rational theologians) thought were removed from direct sense experience, notably God. Theologians also discussed a number of questions which could not be decided based on direct sense experience, such as whether the world has entered existence at some point in the past or has always existed. Theologians were certain, however, that knowledge about such entities and questions could be attained by recourse to experienceable phenomena – that is, by turning to the world around us.

This is illustrated best, one might want to say, in their use of analogical reasoning between the *shāhid*, the domain of experienceable phenomena, and the *ghā'ib*, the domain of phenomena that are not accessible by sense experience (such as the above-mentioned examples).² This form of analogical reasoning was known among theologians by names such as *al-istishhād bi-l-shāhid 'alā al-ghā'ib* (adducing as evidence what is experienceable for what is unexperienceable), *dalālat al-shāhid 'alā al-ghā'ib* (indication of the experienceable to the unexperienceable), or *radd al-ghā'ib ilā al-shāhid*

1 I would like to thank the organisers and participants in the *Beyond Foundationalism* workshop, as well as my colleagues in the MPIWG research group 'Experience in the Premodern Sciences of Soul and Body, ca. 800–1650', for their invaluable comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

2 I translate *al-shāhid* as 'experienceable phenomena' and *al-ghā'ib* as 'unexperienceable phenomena', rather than 'observable' and 'unobservable', as others have done. 'Experience' much better captures the idea of repeated exposure to phenomena, causing a sense of familiarity with them. This comes closer to the theologians' understanding of the *shāhid*.

(tracing the unexperienceable back to the experienceable).³ The idea was that certain experiences of the world became relevant for the science of *kalām* (they were, as it were, turned into ‘scientific objects’, to use contemporary parlance)⁴ insofar as theologians could use them to attain knowledge about unexperienceable phenomena, since the phenomena in the two domains were thought to have something in common that allowed for the transfer of judgement from the *shāhid* to the *ghā’ib*. It is certainly not a coincidence that theologians named the domain of experienceable phenomena ‘*al-shāhid*’, which is derived from the root *shahada*, ‘to bear witness, to testify to something’. This name expressed their conviction that experienceable phenomena ‘bear witness’ to unexperienceable ones. They are, thus, an ‘indication’ (*dalīl*), pointing beyond themselves to what is ‘absent’ or ‘hidden’ (*al-ghā’ib*), and at the same time they become a ‘proof’ (*dalīl*) in the hands of theologians. Thus, we also read: ‘*al-shāhid dalīl al-ghā’ib*’.⁵

This view of the role of experienceable phenomena in *kalām* reflects the conviction already held by the earliest generations of theologians that the purpose of their science was to place religious dogmas on a rational foundation. Many theologians insisted in the opening chapters of their works that speculation was the first, or, in any case, an obligation imposed by God on humans,⁶ and that this was so as ‘blind following of authorities’ (*taqlīd*) in religious questions was unacceptable.⁷ Blind following entailed, so they held, acceptance of someone’s position in the absence of proof. Yet, one needed good reason to follow one person, rather than another, and good reasons meant proof of the truth of what they claimed. Proof would lead to knowledge (*‘ilm*, *ma’rifa*) and do away with mere conviction (*i’tiqād*) and supposition (*ẓann*).⁸ The most fundamental religious dogmas,

3 Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Shāmil*, p. 277; al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, p. 92; al-Ghazālī, *Mi’yār al-‘ilm*, p. 165. On analogical reasoning in *kalām*, see van Ess, *Erkenntnislehre*, pp. 372–94; Erlwein, ‘Translating’.

4 Daston, *Biographies*.

5 Al-Māturīdī, *Al-Tawhīd*, pp. 92–94.

6 For example, al-Māturīdī, *Al-Tawhīd*, p. 73, who quotes Qur’anic verses such as Q. 88:17, ‘Do they not reflect on (*yanẓurūn*) the camels/rainclouds [...]’, and Q. 2:164, ‘In the creation of the heavens and earth [...]’, and then asserts: ‘and other verses in which God advised speculation and made consideration necessary (*alzama*) and commanded (*amara*) reflection and pondering’.

7 For instance, al-Māturīdī, *Al-Tawhīd*, pp. 65–66: ‘We find the people in disagreement about religious dogmas, but agreeing in their disagreement on one thing: that what they believe is true and what others believe is false – and this is supposed to be the case even though all of them can refer back to a pious ancestor whom they follow as an authority (*salaf yuqallad*). This shows that the *muqallid* is not excused as the same problem affects his equal who believes the opposite’. Cf. Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, pp. 14–16.

8 Cf. Frank, ‘Knowledge and *Taqlīd*’. Al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, pp. 254–55: ‘Everyone who is convinced of (*i’taqada*) the principles of religion by *taqlīd*, without knowledge of their proofs (*adilla*) [...]’.

therefore, needed to be subjected to speculation and investigation on the basis of rational arguments. This claim defined the science of *kalām* from the beginning, and it marked the line between the camp of the practitioners of *kalām*, on the one hand, and the traditionists, on the other, who were sceptical about the epistemic value and authority of rational proof in theological questions.⁹

Analogical reasoning between the *shāhid* and the *ghā'ib* is encountered frequently in early *kalām* works. This highlights the important epistemic role of experience of the world, which formed the basis of rational arguments. But merely to note that experience had its definite place in *kalām* is to do injustice to the complexity of the issue. As philosophers of science have shown over the past decades, the concept of experience raises a number of interesting questions.¹⁰ These are worth considering if one is interested in gauging the role of experience in *kalām* more fully. One of these questions is what became known in the literature as the 'theory-ladenness of observation' debate.¹¹ This debate revolved around the insight that, in science as well as other human activities, much of the empirical data are laden with theory. This means that, frequently, theoretical assumptions or expectations pervade the process of collecting, interpreting, describing and using empirical data. Theoretical assumptions even affect perception, observation and experience themselves. This has been illustrated by N. R. Hanson in his seminal work *Patterns of Discovery* (1958):

Let us consider Johannes Kepler [d. 1630]: imagine him on a hill watching the dawn. With him is Tycho Brahe [d. 1601]. Kepler regarded the sun as fixed: it was the earth that moved. But Tycho followed Ptolemy and Aristotle in this much at least: the earth was fixed and all other celestial bodies moved around it. [...] *Do Kepler and Tycho see the same thing in the east at dawn?*¹²

The point of Hanson's thought experiment was to illustrate how theoretical assumptions, such as the geocentrism or heliocentrism in the example

9 Cf. al-Ash'arī, *Risāla*.

10 Cf. Dear, 'Meanings of Experience', who has stated that "experience" can be a category worth of historical investigation' (p. 108), whose 'meanings' (p. 108) and 'connotations' (p. 110) require being fleshed out.

11 Some of the relevant literature is Kuhn, *Structure*, and Fleck, *Entstehung*, whose works are considered foundational; Fodor, 'Observation Reconsidered'; Torretti, 'Observation'; Brewer and Lambert, 'Theory-Ladenness'. Boyd and Bogen, 'Theory', has provided a good historical overview of the debate and contains many pertinent references to publications.

12 Hanson, *Patterns*, p. 5. Italics in original.

at hand,¹³ pervade the very act of observing phenomena as well as their employment in the scientific process: one person's experience of the dawn entails the sun's movement around the fixed earth; the other's experience of the same phenomenon entails the reverse. Hanson thus emphatically concluded that there is 'a difference between a physical state and a visual experience'.¹⁴ Many philosophers of science have, as a consequence, come to regard pure, objective perception, observation and experience as an unobtainable ideal.¹⁵ The 'thing as it really is' might not even exist, or if it were to exist, its discovery would be fraught with serious difficulties. But rather than being an obstacle to science, some have come to argue that the empirical and the theoretical might in fact be usefully intertwined. The focus then shifts to asking how such empirical-*cum*-theoretical data are employed to make science possible in the first place.

The question posed by philosophers of science about the intertwinedness of the empirical and the theoretical is useful, I argue, for gauging the role of experience in *kalām*. As noted, the observation that experience had its place, particularly in the form of the analogy between experienceable and non-experienceable phenomena, is only the starting point, and it requires deeper probing. In this chapter, I will highlight that many theologians certainly agreed that experience was a way to knowledge, and that certain experiences even reached the status of something of a *topos* – for instance, there was a clear preference for invoking humans and their artefacts – but that there was considerable disagreement about what these experiences actually entailed. The disagreement reflected, as I will show, different theoretical assumptions and, more precisely, different, even contradictory theories of causality. The experienceable phenomena invoked by theologians were hence laden with a particular theory of causality. Even though theologians, of course, did not use the contemporary, analytic category of 'theory-ladenness', they certainly did realise that what this conceptual category expresses was no small issue for their science: it will be seen that they framed the success or failure of the science of *kalām* to provide proof for dogmas as depending on certain theoretical assumptions. I will investigate these issues by means of a case-study: in his *Kitāb al-shāmīl*, al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) gives an account of quarrels among Ash'arī and Mu'tazilī theologians over al-Ash'arī's (d. 324/936)

13 'Theory' is a debated concept, too. Compare Boyd and Bogen, 'Theory', p. 2. I use 'theory' in broad terms as an explanation of certain phenomena, or a framework in which they are explained.

14 Hanson, *Patterns*, p. 8.

15 Compare Longino, 'Afterward', p. 391: 'The naïve fantasy that data have an immediate relation to the phenomena of the world, that they are "objective" in some strong, ontological, sense of that term, that they are the facts of the world directly speaking to us, should be finally laid to rest'.

invocation of certain experienceable phenomena in order to settle the theological problem of the world's dependence on God. What is more, I will show that al-Juwaynī's account bears witness that in his time a shift in epistemic values in *kalām* occurred: later generations of theologians did not agree with their predecessors on the epistemic value of experiences of the world and resorted to other methods of proof. This marks a fundamental break in the perceived role of experience in *kalām*.

Al-Ash'arī and Experience

In his *Kitāb al-shāmīl*, al-Juwaynī included a lengthy account of 'attacks of those who deviated [from the truth], and the ways in which these can be repelled'. The deviators – at least in this part of the *Shāmīl* – are identified as Mu'tazilī theologians who 'raised various questions about what our *shaykh* said'.¹⁶ Al-Juwaynī has in mind a particular passage from the *Kitāb al-luma'*, a work written by al-Ash'arī, his school's namesake, from which he proceeds to quote: 'He [al-Ash'arī] said: If someone were to ask, "What is the proof (*dalīl*) that there is a creator for creation?"'

Turning to al-Ash'arī's work, we find that the answer to the question put into a hypothetical interlocutor's mouth follows immediately:

The proof is that the human being [...] was once merely a drop of sperm, then became a blood clot, then flesh. We all know (*qad 'alimnā*) that the human being cannot transform himself from state to state [...]. We see (*ra'aynā*) that the human being is first a child, then a young adult, then an elderly person, and finally old, and we all know that he does not transform himself from state to state [...] but that there is one who transforms him from state to state.¹⁷

Al-Ash'arī then adds:

What makes this clear is that cotton cannot change into spun thread, then a woven garment, without a weaver or maker. He who takes cotton and expects it to become spun thread and then a woven garment without a maker or weaver – he is out of his mind and in utter ignorance! Likewise, he who looks at a wasteland where there is no castle, and expects clay to turn into a different state and bricks to stack themselves on top of each other, without a maker or builder – he is ignorant!¹⁸

16 Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Shāmīl*, p. 275.

17 Al-Ash'arī, *Al-Luma'*, pp. 17–18.

18 Al-Ash'arī, *Al-Luma'*, pp. 17–18.

Al-Ash'arī's proofs for the world's dependence on God are of interest to us insofar as he invokes several experienceable phenomena as analogies, thus highlighting the crucial epistemic role played by experience in *kalām*. Al-Ash'arī indicates that their epistemic function is to fulfil the objective of this science to provide proof for religious dogmas and to move from mere supposition to actual knowledge. An experience ('we see') such as humans' transformation and change engenders the knowledge ('we all know') that this depends on an external cause. Similarly, the experience of buildings and builders, as well as garments and their makers, is translated into the knowledge that one does not occur without the other (expressed by labelling any other expectation as 'ignorance' [*jahl*], the conceptual opposite of knowledge, according to the theologians). The knowledge gained about the world, based on certain experiences, is, in al-Ash'arī's view, the basis for attaining knowledge about phenomena beyond experience, by way of analogy.

It is striking that all the experiences invoked by al-Ash'arī are rather familiar and commonplace; they would arguably have been right in front of the eyes of the majority of people. Al-Ash'arī's proof for the world's dependence on God, resting on familiar, commonplace experiences, is of a quality entirely different from the proof, popular among later generations of theologians, which rested on atomism. As is well known, their proof started with the premise that the whole world consists of atoms, from which bodies are composed and in which accidents inhere; since accidents are originated in time, the bodies, which are their substrate, must be originated, too; this meant that the whole world is originated; and since originated things depend on an originator, the theologians were confident that they had proven the world's dependence on God.¹⁹ There is a real qualitative difference between this proof and al-Ash'arī's proof: many theologians who used the proof based on atomism acknowledged that their proof required theological expertise and was not suitable for the vast majority of people. For instance, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) remarked that 'the proofs for the originatedness [of the world] based on [the accident of] motion – despite being certain (*yaqīniyya*) – are [rather] specific (*daqīqa*) and only the best of creation (*al-afāḍil min al-khalq*) understand them'. This theological proof, he continued, is different from arguments provided by the Qur'an, which calls its audience to observe the world around them. Such Qur'anic arguments can be understood by everyone, 'the clever person, the dull person,

19 Compare Davidson, *Proofs*, Ch. V, 'Kalam Proofs for Creation'. Interestingly, al-Māturīdī was not an atomist, but he did develop proofs based on accidents. Compare Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*, pp. 242–53; Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, pp. 89–90; Erlwein, *Arguments*, pp. 65–66.

and the intelligent person'.²⁰ The difference between al-Ash'arī's proof and the proof used by later theologians, such as al-Rāzī, is a first indication of the changing epistemic value associated with experience in *kalām*, and it will be unpacked in what follows.

Mu'tazilī Critique of al-Ash'arī's Experiences

To see how these debates unfolded, let us return to al-Juwaynī's *Kitāb al-shāmil*. His account is rather detailed, but, interestingly, the debates revolved mainly around one particular experience cited by al-Ash'arī: buildings require builders. In addition, theologians debated an experience that al-Ash'arī did not mention in the relevant passage in the *Kitāb al-luma'*, but which they apparently associated with him: writings require writers. It might be that, in the consciousness of later generations of theologians, the two experiences became associated with al-Ash'arī, even though he only mentions one, as they appear together in the works of other theologians that have come down to us.²¹ Al-Juwaynī reports that the Mu'tazilīs put forward the following critique:

One of their criticisms was this: [...] The most absurd thing [al-Ash'arī] said was to declare him ignorant who expects a building without a builder and a writing without a writer [...]. According to him, the writing and the building are not two things humans have power over (*maqḍūrān*), for it is his principle that humans have no power over what occurs outside the place of their power [that is, on other things], and there is therefore no connection between building and builder, neither by way of acquisition (*iktisāb*) nor by way of true creation (*ikhtirā*).²²

The point made by the Mu'tazilīs needs some unpacking: al-Ash'arī is not justified in his claim to know that buildings have builders, on the basis of the experience which he uses as evidence. This is so because the particular theory of causality that al-Ash'arī upholds – namely, occasionalism, as it is nowadays termed – implies the denial that buildings come about because of their builders. To assume a causal connection between them is – as entailed by occasionalism – to fall prey to something of an illusion.

20 Al-Rāzī, *Al-Taḥṣīn*, vol. 13, p. 55. Al-Rāzī said this in reference to the Quranic story of Abraham's realisation of the truth of monotheism when he observed the night sky. For theologians and 'the masses' (*al-awāmm*), respectively, experienceable phenomena, such as the setting star, have entirely different significance.

21 An example is al-Māturīdī, *Al-Tawḥīd*, p. 84

22 Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Shāmil*, p. 276.

The true efficient cause of all buildings emerging before our eyes is always God. The theoretical framework behind the experience should have prompted al-Ash'arī to describe it as a case of 'buildings emerging together with builders', but not 'because of' them. But how should one, then, be justified in one's claim to know, based on experience, that buildings have builders, so as to argue, by analogy, that the world must have a maker, too?

This has detrimental consequences, according to the Mu'tazilīs: precisely because al-Ash'arī's experienceable phenomena are so laden with a particular theory, he unwittingly put *kalām's* endeavour at risk to place religious dogmas (such as that God created the world) on a foundation of proof. The Mu'tazilīs averred:

You [followers of al-Ash'arī] are unable to prove [the world's dependence on] the creator. This is so as you deny that we humans in the domain of experience (*al-shāhid*) actually bring about [buildings and the like]. But in order to affirm a judgement for the domain beyond experience (*al-ghā'ib*) one has to link it to the experienceable domain [by way of analogy]! In consequence, if you deny a creator and originator in the experienceable domain [...] you will not find a way to affirm an originator [in the domain beyond experience]!²³

Furthermore:

There is no point in using as evidence something that contradicts one's own principle!²⁴

Thus, the argument is that al-Ash'arī put the enterprise of *kalām* at risk when he made use of experiences in a flawed way – 'flawed' not insofar as invoking buildings and builders was not considered useful by the Mu'tazilīs, but insofar as his experience was laden with a particular theory. Since the Mu'tazilīs agreed with al-Ash'arī that the dogma in question was to be proven by drawing an analogy between the *shāhid* and the *ghā'ib*, they insisted that one had to affirm efficient causality for the *shāhid*, in order to affirm the same for the *ghā'ib*. When invoking the experience of buildings and builders, one consequently has to affirm that humans really are the efficient causes of buildings. The Mu'tazilīs essentially urged the followers of al-Ash'arī to rethink the theoretical framework which underlies their invocation of experience and to exchange one theory of causality (that is,

23 Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Shāmil*, pp. 276–77.

24 Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Shāmil*, p. 276.

occasionalism) with another (that is, the characteristic Mu'tazilī affirmation of humans as true efficient causes besides God).²⁵

We can conclude from this that the quarrels among these early theologians did not concern the general usefulness of experience as a way to knowledge in *kalām*, but rather the question of what precisely certain experiences had to entail, if they were to fulfil their epistemic purpose.

Later Ash'arī Defence of al-Ash'arī's Experiences

We do not know how al-Ash'arī responded, or would have responded, to the critique put forward by the Mu'tazilīs. (Al-Juwaynī does not inform us whether these Mu'tazilīs were contemporaries of al-Ash'arī or came after him.) Maybe he would have countered that the Mu'tazilīs were misrepresenting him, since his invocation of buildings and builders was never about the causal link, but merely about the experience that one always comes with the other. Maybe al-Ash'arī would have maintained that he chose these experiences as instances of design, in order to argue that well-designed artefacts provide us with good grounds to argue that this should also be expected of the world, which also strikes us as well-designed. An argument from design could, of course, be employed by proponents of both occasionalism and other theories of causality. Al-Ash'arī might consequently have accused the Mu'tazilīs of introducing an aspect into his argument – that is, different theories of causality – which he himself did not consider relevant to the problem.

There is, however, a difficulty here. If this should be what al-Ash'arī had in mind, then we need to note that he does not make it explicit. He does not actually say that the aspect which he considers relevant is the idea of design or arrangement; other theologians were more explicit about this, speaking of 'the most excellent and perfect arrangement (*tartīb*)'²⁶ and 'the wondrous arrangement' (*ʿajīb al-tadbīr*)²⁷ in the world. What al-Ash'arī explicitly mentions is 'transformation from state to state' (in the case of humans) and 'changing' (in the case of garments). This gives the impression that he wants to draw an analogy between these experienceable phenomena and the world as a whole, based on the shared feature of transformation and change. It is this feature which then justifies the judgement that the world, like these experienceable phenomena, requires a creator.

What is more, while we may indeed have reason to wonder whether the Mu'tazilīs imposed the problem of causality on al-Ash'arī's invocation

25 On Ash'arī and Mu'tazilī theories of causality, see Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, Ch. 5, 'Cosmology in Early Islam'; Frank, 'Structure'.

26 Al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib*, vol. 1, part 1, p. 233.

27 Al-Qāsim, *Al-Dalīl*, p. 98.

of buildings and garments, the situation appears different regarding his invocation of humans' transformation from state to state. This experience is laden with a particular theory of causality, and it has to be in order for al-Ash'arī to use it the way he does. Al-Ash'arī explicitly argued that this transformation is not explained by recourse to the human being, but by an external cause ('the human being cannot transform himself from state to state [...] there is one who transforms him from state to state'). This experience presumes al-Ash'arī's occasionalist theory of causality, according to which God, the only efficient cause in the cosmos, brought about the transformation. It was important for al-Ash'arī to argue that the transformation could not have been caused by anything in the human being, for otherwise he could not have concluded that the world depended on an external cause. This would, however, have been vigorously contested by many practitioners of another science – that is, *falsafa* or Islamic philosophy – as is well known. They subscribed to an entirely different theory of causality, assuming the existence of secondary causes.²⁸ Had they invoked the same experience, it would have entailed that the transformation is explained by natural processes inherent in the human being. No cause external to the human being would have been invoked. This illustrates just how al-Ash'arī's experience of humans' transformation from state to state is laden with the occasionalist theory of causality.

But this is not something most Mu'tazilīs would have disagreed about, and they would have joined al-Ash'arī in his analysis against possible criticisms put forward by Islamic philosophers. The reason why their critique focused on al-Ash'arī's invocation of buildings and builders (as well as writings and writers) is that this is where the bone of contention was for them. Hence, while we do not know if al-Ash'arī would have defended himself by accusing the Mu'tazilīs of introducing the question of causality into his experiences, it appears that this was the defence chosen by later theologians of their school's namesake:

Some [Ash'arī] imams mentioned another aspect in order to deflect the criticism: a writing does not occur unless from (*min*) a writer, so the writing is bound to (*irtabaṭat*) the writer. This is why we declare him ignorant who expects a writing and a building to occur without (*min ghayr*) writer and builder. So if one thing is bound to another, and if the aim is [nothing more than] to consider [this] in order to affirm the connection in a general way and not in its details, then it does not matter whether the connection (*irtibāṭ*) is in the manner of acquisition (*kasb*) or real creation (*ikhtirā*) or the

28 On *falsafa* theories of causality, see Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, Ch. 5, 'Cosmology in Early Islam'; Frank, 'Structure', and *Creation*.

uniform occurrence of habit (*iṭrād al-‘āda*). This is so as the person possessed of reason knows about the connection first, and then comes to know about its details thanks to rigorous reasoning.²⁹

These later Ash‘arī theologians insisted that al-Ash‘arī had no concern for theories of causality when he cited the above-mentioned experiences, and in fact there was no need for him to enter this territory as every sensible person knows of the connection in question anyways.

Other later Ash‘arī theologians, however, appear to have, in a way, agreed with the Mu‘tazilīs that the experiences invoked by al-Ash‘arī were theory-laden and that al-Ash‘arī himself actually intended for it to be so. Yet the Mu‘tazilī critique was still unfounded, they insisted, as al-Ash‘arī’s experiences were in fact compatible with his theory of causality:

Some said: He [al-Ash‘arī] intended by ‘the writing’ (*kitāba*), which he used as evidence, the [bodily] movements of the writer which manifest in a place he intends and which are followed by the arrangement of letters and lines, according to habit. So, what he used as evidence is [in fact] what the writer has power over!³⁰

These Ash‘arīs argued that, when their namesake spoke of the dependence of a writing on a writer, he did not mean the actual artefact of the book, which, so they acknowledged, was not within the power of humans to produce, but was God’s habitual creation. Rather, al-Ash‘arī meant the movements performed by the writer, which were indeed under his control. The Mu‘tazilīs’ charge that the experiences invoked by al-Ash‘arī went counter to his own theory of causality and were consequently pointless was unfounded, according to their argument.

Debating the Epistemic Value of Experience: Later Ash‘arī Theologians

Al-Juwaynī’s account makes it clear that the disputes among Mu‘tazilī and Ash‘arī theologians were primarily concerned with solving the challenge posed by the perceived theory-ladenness of al-Ash‘arī’s experiences. But none of them doubted the general usefulness of such experiences in *kalām*. Al-Juwaynī’s account, however, also reveals that for some later Ash‘arīs the problem apparently ran deeper. They went a step further and called into question the epistemic value of the experiences invoked by their predecessors as a way to knowledge in *kalām*.

29 Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Shāmil*, pp. 283–84.

30 Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Shāmil*, p. 280.

Al-Juwaynī continues his description of how later followers of al-Ash‘arī attempted to fend off the charge that the founder of their school had failed to prove what he had set out to prove – namely, that the world is dependent on God – because the experiences cited by him were pointless. The Ash‘arīs are reported as arguing that ‘our *shaykh* intended to say that it is known *necessarily* (*iḍtirāran*) that originated things cannot bring themselves about’.³¹ This is known, they argued, when one considers that originated things have an inherent possibility (*jawāz*) to enter existence or to remain non-existent, and that they are therefore dependent on an external cause – that is, one who particularises one possibility over the other (*mukhaṣṣis*).³²

Al-Juwaynī reveals that he himself supports this reading of al-Ash‘arī’s invocation of experienceable phenomena and bluntly states: ‘The most appropriate method, in my view, is to assert *necessity* (*al-ḍarūra*) in this matter’.³³ He provides an explanation why: without asserting that it is known by necessity that originated things in general are so characterised as to depend on an external cause, the theologian would never be able to effectively refute an opponent’s challenge that ‘originated things do not come about due to a cause’. Crucially, al-Juwaynī then explains that reference to ‘experienceable phenomena’ (*shawāhid*) and ‘examples’ (*amthila*) taken from the domain of the *shāhid* may help to ‘clarify’ (*awḍaḥa*) this item of knowledge; yet he insists that these can never replace ‘asserting necessity’ in this matter.³⁴ This is made explicit when al-Juwaynī asserts:

The connection between originated thing and originator [...] is established without consideration of experienceable phenomena (*al-shāhid*) and phenomena beyond experience (*al-ghā’ib*). This is so since origination, which is possible (*jā’iz*) in itself, depends, from the viewpoint of its possibility, on a particulariser. It is, thus, not necessary to affirm an agent in the experienceable domain (*shāhidan*).³⁵

Convinced of his analysis, al-Juwaynī rejects the Mu‘tazilīs’ critique as unfounded:

As for their claim that the affirmation of the originator in the unexperienceable domain (*al-ghā’ib*) is not possible for him who does not affirm an originator in the experienceable domain (*al-shāhid*) – this is false!³⁶

31 Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Shāmil*, p. 282. Emphasis added.

32 On arguments from particularisation, see Davidson, ‘Arguments’.

33 Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Shāmil*, p. 282. Emphasis added.

34 Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Shāmil*, p. 283.

35 Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Shāmil*, p. 285.

36 Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Shāmil*, p. 285.

This account illustrates that al-Juwaynī and some of his peers strayed in a significant way from their predecessors: unlike in analogical reasoning between experienceable and unexperienceable phenomena – that is, in the *istishhād bi-l-shāhid ‘alā al-ghā’ib* frequently employed by early theologians, including al-Ash‘arī – particular experiences are no longer required to prove the crucial dogma that the world was created by God. Al-Ash‘arī had invoked concrete experiences, such as the construction of buildings by humans, as the very foundation on which the proof that the world depends on God rested. Underlying this was the notion that such experiences were essential for arriving at a verdict about the phenomena in question that was removed from sense experience. By claiming that ‘the connection between act and agent’³⁷ is known necessarily, when one ponders the idea of ‘possibility’ (*jawāz*), later theologians denigrated the epistemic value of experience. Concrete experiences of the kind invoked by al-Ash‘arī were now merely a rhetorical tool, or an illustrative aid. They were, however, irrelevant to proving that the world actually depends on an external cause, God. Pondering over a concept that is metaphysical in nature – namely, possibility – was sufficient to know that the world depends on a cause; this doctrine did not require an empirical basis, an empirical test of the principle of causation.³⁸ What is more, al-Juwaynī and his peers opted for a form of argument that established the world’s dependence on God, by deductively subsuming the world under the general rule that originated things require, in view of their possibility, an external cause. This form of argument runs counter to analogical reasoning, which rests on the idea that particular experienceable phenomena (the *shāhid*) reveal something about particular unexperienceable phenomena (the *ghā’ib*). It might also be questioned whether al-Ash‘arī had in mind the general notion of ‘origination’, like his successors who focused on the ‘connection between originated thing and originator’, when he invoked buildings and their builders, as well as garments and their makers.

From the viewpoint of the history of ideas and the history of science, it would be interesting to trace in detail what caused theologians such as al-Juwaynī to replace arguments based on experience by arguments based on the notion that originated things are possible in terms of their existence and non-existence and, therefore, require a particularising cause. Herbert A.

37 Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Shāmil*, p. 282.

38 Compare Abrahamov, ‘Necessary Knowledge’. Interestingly, in *al-Aqīda al-Nizāmiyya* al-Juwaynī abandoned the position which he had previously championed in the *Shāmil*, that the dependence of originated things on an originator is known necessarily. In the *Aqīda* he insists that this knowledge requires speculation (*naẓar*) and contemplation (*iftikār*) (pp. 13–14). Hume famously denied that ‘the general maxim in philosophy’ that originated things have a cause could be ‘taken for granted [...] without any proof given or demanded’ (Hume, *Treatise*, p. 56) and declared its origin in ‘experience’ (p. 58) instead.

Davidson has argued that this notion ‘must have been suggested to Juwaynī by Avicenna’s analysis of the concepts of possibly existent and necessarily existent’.³⁹ Notwithstanding Ibn Sīnā’s (d. 428/1037) undoubted influence on *kalām* – which Robert Wisnovsky, for instance, has summed up under the title of the ‘Avicennian turn in Sunnī theology’⁴⁰ – it may be questioned whether this is all that we are dealing with in the present case. It should be noted that al-Juwaynī himself attributes the argument based on possibility to the Mu‘tazilīs, specifically Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā‘ī (d. 321/933), who preceded Ibn Sīnā by a century. Al-Juwaynī states:

[...] and he who asserts the possibility of their existence (*jawāz kawnihā*) and the possibility of their enduring non-existence (*jawāz istimrār al-‘adam*) – he knows [...] necessarily (*ḍarūratan*) that these originated things did not come about due to themselves, without a cause who made one possibility necessary (*muqtaḍin*) or who particularised it (*mukhaṣṣiṣ*). Ibn al-Jubbā‘ī was of this opinion, and other Mu‘tazilīs [...].⁴¹

Tracing the precise influences that caused al-Juwaynī and his peers to reconsider the epistemic value of experience goes beyond the scope of this chapter. What we can say, however, is that al-Juwaynī evidently found himself faced with the same challenge as some of his Ash‘arī predecessors – namely, that their school’s namesake had in fact frequently made use of experienceable phenomena and that he had declared that they were nothing short of a ‘proof’ (*dalīl*) for the world’s dependence on God. Al-Juwaynī patently also felt the need to defend al-Ash‘arī, in view of his assertion that experience is merely illustrative and that the originated thing’s dependence on an external cause is known necessarily. Al-Juwaynī thus insists:

The best and most appropriate method is to assert necessity, and this is precisely what the speech of our *shaykh* indicates when he restricted himself to declaring people ignorant when he cited as evidence the building and writing, even if he did not reveal the precise form of his reasoning (*ṣiġhat al-istidlāl*). This is why there is no objection to our *shaykh*!⁴²

Hence, it turns out, if we are to follow al-Juwaynī, that al-Ash‘arī had asserted all along the necessary nature of the knowledge that originated

39 Davidson, *Proofs*, p. 161.

40 Wisnovsky, ‘Avicennian Turn’.

41 Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Shāmil*, p. 282.

42 Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Shāmil*, p. 283.

things require an originator. Al-Ash'arī might not have made this explicit. But he never intended the experiences he invoked to be anything more than illustrative examples, to emphasise that every sensible person would agree on this item of knowledge. The Mu'tazilīs' critique, and their focus on the perceived challenges posed by the intertwinedness of al-Ash'arī's experiences with a particular theory of causality, missed the point right from the start – thus al-Juwaynī. Once more, we might want to raise the question whether al-Juwaynī's reading, too, is in fact a case of back-projection, of a later interpretation of al-Ash'arī's intentions that wishes to make him, the esteemed founder of the Ash'arī school, conform to changed epistemic values; in particular, the role of experience in proving the dogma in question.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, we have traced a shift, occurring over time in what Islamic theologians regarded as proof and a way to knowledge in the science of *kalām*. This shift concerned the epistemic value of sense experience. Al-Juwaynī's account of debates between Ash'arī and Mu'tazilī theologians about al-Ash'arī's invocation of certain experienceable phenomena in his proof that the world depends on God allowed us to reconstruct this shift: experienceable phenomena, once viewed as essential to proving religious dogmas, were denigrated to a mere illustrative tool. We saw that early theologians quarrelled about the perceived theory-ladenness of al-Ash'arī's experiences; both Mu'tazilī and Ash'arī theologians realised that invoking buildings and builders, as well as writings and writers, could raise questions about the intertwinedness of experience with different, even opposing, theories of causality. But they all considered experienceable phenomena in principle as suitable for their purposes. This changed with later theologians, among them al-Juwaynī himself. For them, the challenge posed by invoking experiences ran deeper. They consequently shifted their focus away from concrete experiences of the world and focused instead on a qualitatively very different proof based on the general rule, known as a matter of necessity, not by experience, that originated things require a cause due to their inherent possibility.

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CHAPTER 5

Divine Freedom meets Logical Necessity: On the Relationship between Rational Speculation and Knowledge in Classical Ash'arī Foundationalism

Laura Hassan

Introduction

Among the hallmarks of Ash'arī theology is its insistence that divine autonomy is absolute. This is a major impetus behind a wide spectrum of the theological commitments held among school members. In ethics, neither God's commands nor His own action are constrained by an objective morality external to Him. In the realm of human action, God's freedom is not curtailed by His creatures, since they are free neither to determine nor to create their acts.¹ In nature, God is not constrained by conditions: the existence of the eye is not a condition for the occurrence of vision, nor is the presence of oxygen a condition for the occurrence of combustion. Despite the insistence on God's total freedom, His habitual action (*ādat* or *sunnat Allāh*) is taken to be reliable to the extent that the world is a highly predictable place. Ash'arīs appeal to the constancy of God's habit as a mechanism that secures patterns in life, including the predictability of reward and punishment and the reliability of observation. Recently, the compatibility of an empirical scientific rationalism with an occasionalist metaphysics has been defended in this manner.²

In this chapter, I will examine a point of intersection between the Ash'arīs' doctrine of divine freedom and their epistemological theory of rational speculation (*naẓar*) leading to knowledge (*ilm*). Specifically, I present a hitherto under-examined discussion in Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī's

1 There are important exceptions to this; see Thiele, 'Conceptions of Determination', and the discussion of al-Juwaynī's later thought in what follows.

2 In, for instance, Moad, 'Ibn Khaldūn and Occasionalism'. David Jalajel is also a proponent of this perspective. I am grateful to both scholars for discussions which have been instrumental to the expression of my argument.

(d. 478/1085) *Kitāb al-shāmil* in which he responds to a claim made by his teacher, Abū Ishāq al-Isfārā'īnī (d. 418/1027), concerning the possibility for discursive knowledge being acquired in the absence of *naẓar*. I will demonstrate that the formulation of the relationship between *naẓar* and *ilm* maintained by some later Ash'arīs (including 'Aḍūd al-Dīn al-Ījī [d. 756/1355]) is discontinuous with discussions among these earlier Ash'arī practitioners. The evidence of disagreement between Ash'arī epistemologies provides a realistic picture of the evolution within a tradition which spans many centuries.³ This is a corrective to more essentialising depictions of Ash'arī rationalism.

I will also advance the argument that the disagreement over the relationship between *naẓar* and *ilm* reveals that the notion of God's habit is not sufficient to secure a foundationalist epistemology. In order for reasoning to succeed, God's action in creating knowledge subsequent to reasoning must be determined by logical necessity. This turns out to be the sole constraint within the Ash'arī universe on God's otherwise unrestricted freedom. I will show that al-Juwaynī implicitly recognised logical necessity as precisely such a limitation and conclude that this is entirely consistent with the second great impetus behind Ash'arī theology – namely, the conviction that God is knowable supremely *via* logical reasoning.

Naẓar as an Apparent Cause (sabab zāhiri) of Knowledge

The essential philosophical problem treated in this chapter is whether sound reasoning has any necessary connection with the knowledge that succeeds it. In his monograph on theories of causality in the Islamic tradition, Özgür Koca has advanced the following claim:

Ash'arites do not see a necessary relationship between contemplation (*naẓar*) and knowledge (*ilm*). God can create knowledge without contemplation. The relationship is one of proximity. God could also choose not to create knowledge despite the existence of contemplation. Contemplation does not necessarily generate (*tawlid*) knowledge. Thus causal cognitive relations are also possible.⁴

Koca's reading appears to be accurate for certain later Ash'arīs. In his commentary on the Māturīdī scholar Abū Ḥafs al-Nasafī's (d. 537/1142) *al-Aqā'id al-Nasafiyya*, for example, Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390)

3 Other recent studies which do the same from a broader perspective include Shihadeh, 'The Argument from Ignorance', and Ibrahim, 'Reason and Revelation in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and the Ash'arī Tradition'.

4 Koca, *Islam, Causality and Freedom*, p. 27.

discusses epistemic sources under al-Nasafi's heading 'the means of knowledge' (*asbāb al-ʿilm*). Here, al-Taftāzānī's simple distinction between apparent (or 'external') means (*al-sabab al-ẓāhiri*) and the sole effective means – that is, the ontological cause (*al-sabab al-muʾaththir*) of knowledge (and of everything else) – appears to set his epistemology entirely within the terms set out by Koca.⁵ 'The [causally] effective means of all knowledge is God – may He be exalted', writes al-Taftāzānī, 'and the apparent means, like the fire to burning, is the intellect (*al-ʿaql*)'.⁶ Al-Ījī prefigures this with his summary articulation of the position, which he identifies as that of 'the Shaykh' (Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī [d. 324/936]) – namely that *naẓar* produces knowledge 'by [God's] habit, on the basis that all possibles (*mumkināt*) depend in their origination upon God – exalted may He be'.⁷

It is indeed true of all classical Ashʿarīs that they deny that contemplation is a cause of knowledge and, in fact, the secondary generation of effects (*tawlid*) absolutely. However, although Koca derives evidence of this formulation of the relationship between *naẓar* and *ʿilm* from discussions present in al-Bāqillānī's *Kitāb al-tamhīd* and al-Juwaynī's *Kitāb al-shāmil*, he appears to overlook important nuances over how that relationship should be defined. In the following discussion, I will revisit al-Juwaynī's *Kitāb al-shāmil* in particular, in order to highlight two matters: firstly, I emphasise the fact that classical Ashʿarīs endorse the reality of logical necessity, and that this is crucial to the school's rationality.⁸ Secondly, I demonstrate that neither al-Juwaynī nor al-Bāqillānī endorsed a theory of mere proximity (*iqtirān*) between *naẓar* and *ʿilm*. This is to say that, despite their commitment to the exclusivity of God's power, they did not sever the metaphysically necessary connection between God's creation of sound reasoning together with His creation of knowledge.

5 Note that al-Taftāzānī is known to endorse a broad Sunnism, inclusive of certain Māturīdī positions. The term *sabab* can be translated as 'occasion', 'means', or 'cause': the appropriate term depends on the notion of causality evoked, as demonstrated by al-Taftāzānī's distinction.

6 Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-aqāʾid*, p. 15. The epistemology of later Ashʿarism deserves much study and is increasingly subject to research. My reading of al-Taftāzānī on this point is tentative: I do not wish to commit myself to a particular reading of his epistemology, as there may be other relevant loci for the discussion of this issue, of which I am not yet aware.

7 Al-Ījī, *Al-Mawāqif*, pp. 27–28. He has rejected a position which he has identified with Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), namely that our knowledge follows reasoning necessarily but not as an effect of human action. Al-Ījī insisted against this later Rāzīan position that 'there is no necessity [deriving] from God, nor [imposed] upon him', since he is a voluntary agent (*qādir mukhtār*). On al-Rāzī's understanding of knowledge acquisition in his later works, see Jacobsen Ben Hammed, 'Meno's Paradox and First Principles'; for its context in al-Rāzī's theory of human action, see Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics*, Ch. 1, especially pp. 31–33.

8 This much is well-documented in existing scholarship, as I shall show.

Al-Juwaynī on the *Nazar*-*ʿIlm* Relationship

Al-Juwaynī's *Kitāb al-irshād* offers us a *précis* of his position on the relationship between rational speculation and knowledge, while the extant parts of the discussion of *nazar* in his *Kitāb al-shāmil* grant us access to the broader theoretical landscape within which he formulated his position. The two works were written alongside one another, the *Irshād* a shorter manual, the *Shāmil* an extensive and eponymously comprehensive *summa* of *kalām*, which is styled as a commentary on the thought of 'the Qāḍī al-Bāqillānī'.⁹ Al-Juwaynī, entirely in keeping with the understanding of al-Bāqillānī, is very clear in these works that all human knowledge is the direct creation of God. Yet, we shall see that Koca's claim that Ash'arī epistemology functions within an entirely contingent universe is challenged by al-Juwaynī's expression of the imperative for logical necessity.

Nazar Does Not Cause Knowledge

The terminology used by al-Juwaynī when discussing the results of sound reasoning captures the tension between the theological imperative of preserving God's exclusive creative freedom and the rational imperative that sound reasoning reliably produces knowledge. Al-Juwaynī uses a variety of expressions. He writes that 'reasoning (*nazar*) contains (or "entails": *yataḍamman*) knowledge if it is sound',¹⁰ that sound *nazar* 'leads to (*yu'addi ilā*)' or 'arrives at (*yufḍi ilā*)' knowledge and that, 'by reasoning', knowledge 'occurs (*yaḥṣul*)'.¹¹ In explanation of his notion of *taḍammun*, he writes that he means that, if reasoning is sound, 'the establishment of knowledge (*thubūt al-ʿilm*) becomes rationally certain (*yatayaqqan 'aqlan*)'.¹² Each of these expressions is carefully chosen to avoid the assertion of a direct causal relationship between *nazar* and *ʿilm*. Yet each term also expresses the connection between the existence of *nazar* and the knowledge which succeeds it. It is unclear from the expressions themselves whether this connection

9 An extensive but incomplete (and otherwise imperfect) edition of the *Shāmil* was published in 1969; Richard M. Frank later supplemented this with extracts from additional manuscripts in 1981. I rely on both (additional extracts that have not been used in this study are in Helmut Klopfer [1959]). Two shorter creedal treatises by al-Juwaynī are extant, *Al-Luma' fī al-adilla*, and a work produced later in his life, *Al-Aqida al-Nizāmiyya*. Neither contain detailed discussion of the issue at hand. The dating of most of al-Juwaynī's theological works is unknown; however, for an attempted chronology, see Michel Allard, *Textes apologetiques de Guwayni (m. 478/1085)* (Beirut: Dar el-Mashreq, 1968), cited in Siddiqui, *Law and Politics under the Abbasids*, p. 110, n. 1.

10 Al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-shāmil* (1969), p. 110; al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-irshād*, p. 6.

11 Al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-irshād*, pp. 4–6.

12 Al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-irshād*, p. 6.

is, to al-Juwaynī's mind, one of causal necessity. Thankfully, he treats the question in some detail.

Few ontological categories are available to the classical Ash'arīs. Al-Juwaynī readily excludes the following configurations for the reasoning-knowledge relationship:

1. Reasoning as a secondary cause (*sabab*) of knowledge: al-Juwaynī rejects the Mu'tazilī belief that secondary generation (*tawlīd*) provides the connection between reasoning and knowledge.
2. Reasoning as a determinant (*'illa*) of knowledge: al-Juwaynī denies that *naẓar* is a determinant of knowledge.¹³ The category of determinant is eliminated on the basis that it can only exist contemporaneously with its effect (as in the case of knowledge as a determinant of its substrate being knowing).¹⁴
3. Reasoning as a condition (*shart*) of knowledge: in the *Shāmil*, al-Juwaynī ascribes this position to al-Bāqillānī, writing of him that he maintained that in the case of 'anything which depends upon a certain thing (*x*) for its establishment (*kull mā yatawaqqaf thubūtuḥu 'alā amrin*), yet *x* is not a necessitating cause for it, *x* is a condition of it (*fa-huwa shart fihī*)'.¹⁵ The prime example of a condition established among classical Ash'arīs is life as a condition of the presence of knowledge (or ignorance).¹⁶ A criticism recorded by al-Juwaynī is that conditions must occur contemporaneously with that for which they are a condition. Yet the numerous created accidents of reasoning involved in the formulation of a proof are temporally prior to the created accidents of knowledge with which they are associated.

Al-Juwaynī's solution as settled upon in the *Irshād* is to assert that, in the presence of sound *naẓar*, the establishment of knowledge is 'inevitable (*ḥatm*) without one being the cause of the other (*min ghayr an yūjib aḥaduhumā al-thānī aw yūjiduhu aw yuwalliduhu*)'. This he likens to the relationship between volition and knowledge: it is not possible to will something without knowledge of the object of volition; yet 'the mutual entailment one of the other (*talāzumuhumā*) does not demand that one is the creator, necessitator, or secondary cause of the other'.¹⁷

13 He writes: 'Reasoning does not generate knowledge and neither does it necessitate it as the necessitation of the determinant cause to its effect (*lā yuwallid al-naẓar al-'ilm wa-lā yūjibuhu ijāb al-'illa ma'lūlahā*)' (al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-irshād*, p. 6).

14 Al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-shāmil* (1969), p. 110. Additionally, it is a well-established tenet of Ash'arism that one accident cannot be the cause of another.

15 Al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-shāmil* (1969), p. 110.

16 On which, see note 14.

17 Al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-irshād*, pp. 6–7.

Al-Juwaynī secures this understanding of the *naẓar-ilm* relationship by identifying the precise ontological locus of concomitance between the two. Sohaira Siddiqui has insightfully analysed al-Juwaynī's epistemology, emphasising its implications in the domain of jurisprudence. She has shown, in her analysis of the *Shāmil*, that al-Juwaynī isolates a specific 'aspect' of a given proof (*wajh al-dalīl*) as that which entails knowledge. Our knowledge of this aspect of the proof exists simultaneously with the knowledge acquired by it (that is, its *madlūl*). There may be a multi-step reasoning process consisting in a number of act-accidents of reasoning prior to the acquisition of this specific aspect, but it is this final act-accident of reasoning which exists simultaneously with the object of proof.¹⁸ In isolating an aspect of the proof as that which entails knowledge, al-Juwaynī is able to reconcile the notion of logical necessity already found in al-Bāqillānī with the Ash'arī ontology of accidents. For his part, al-Bāqillānī drew a clear distinction between the multi-step process of reasoning and the kinds of logical necessity which connect reasoning with knowledge. The former, he writes, are described as *dalīl* only 'loosely' (*majāzan, ittāsā'an*); it is the latter which secure knowledge. Al-Bāqillānī enumerates several relations that constitute *dalīl*, including, for instance, that between word and referent, and the fact that there are determinants or grounds (*'illa*) for observable states.¹⁹ Al-Juwaynī's 'aspect of the

18 Al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Shāmil* (1981), p. 12; Siddiqui, *Law and Politics under the Abbasids*, p. 113.

19 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-tamhīd*, p. 11–14. The determinant cause (*'illa*) is a crucial ontological category for early Ash'arī epistemology. Created accidents (*'arād*) are understood to be determinants of the attributes of objects. These accidents are themselves always the direct creation of God. Their causal efficacy is extremely limited: they have no influence on anything besides the atom in which they inhere, nor beyond the atomic moment in which they exist. Yet it is this ontological *'illa*, and not God, which directly and necessarily determines the way things are. Without this minor concession to metaphysical necessity, Ash'arī rationality would fall. In order for anything to be knowable, there must be a fixity in the world. This fixity is divinely created in the form of determinants including accidents, securing our ability to infer information from observable particulars. (For instance, we can infer that all knowing beings possess knowledge because it is the accident of knowledge that determines that its substrate is knowing.) Without inference, nothing can be known about the unobservable realm (*al-ghāib*), making knowledge of God as the Ash'arīs pursued it impossible. On the role of the *'illa* in *kalām* logic, see van Ess, 'The Logical Structure', pp. 251–59. Note that the logical and ontological *'illa* are not identical. Indeed, al-Juwaynī is scathing of those who falsely equate the epistemological *dalīl* with the ontological *'illa*, thereby maintaining the convertibility of rational evidence (on this, see Shihadeh, 'The Argument from Ignorance', pp. 204–5; cf. al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, p. 211). Van Ess has also pointed out the terminological ambiguity surrounding the *'illa* in 'The Logical Structure', pp. 255–56. Nevertheless, without ontological determinants, logical reasons could not occur. Thus, the *'illa* can be understood as a divinely created form of metaphysical necessity that secures logical necessity.

proof is the precise logical relation uncovered by the process of reasoning, already described by al-Bāqillānī. Al-Juwaynī can reconcile this notion of logical necessity with the ontology of accidents through a theory which he defends elsewhere – namely, that one created accident of knowledge (*ilm*) can be related to two separate objects of knowledge (*ma'lūmayn*). In this case, the *wajh al-dalīl* and its associated *madlūl* are two objects of knowledge for which only a single accident of knowledge is created by God. Thus, as he puts it, ‘the knowledge of the aspect of the proof (*wajh al-dalīl*) is knowledge of that which is indicated (*al-madlūl*)’.²⁰ The editor of Abū al-Qāsim al-Anṣārī’s (d. 512/1118) *al-Ghunya fī l-kalām* neatly expresses the position that al-Anṣārī shares with his teacher, al-Juwaynī: ‘the existence of a *dalīl* which does not indicate its *madlūl* is inconceivable: for there is no meaning to ‘*dalīl*’ save ‘that which entails the knowledge of its *madlūl*’.²¹

Interestingly, the position that one created accident of knowledge can be associated with two objects is reported to be a minority position among Ash‘arī theologians, with al-Bāqillānī and al-Juwaynī being two key proponents.²² One motivating factor for al-Juwaynī in advancing this theory may be the need to reconcile the doctrine of God’s creation of accidents with the belief that, when we discover a genuine proof, we obtain knowledge by necessity.²³ Within a somewhat confining ontology, al-Juwaynī is able

20 Al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-shāmil* (1981), p. 12 (I follow Siddiqui’s translation); on al-Juwaynī’s belief that one created accident of knowledge may be associated with two objects of knowledge (*ma'lūmayn*), see al-Āmidī, *Abkār al-afkār*, vol. 1, p. 95; cf. al-Anṣārī, *Al-Ghunya*, vol. 1, p. 558. Siddiqui has held that al-Juwaynī is the first to insist that there is necessity in the relationship between *dalīl* and *madlūl*. She has argued that al-Bāqillānī contrasts innate and other kinds of necessary knowledge with knowledge acquired through reasoning, which is merely ‘epistemically probable’, drawing evidence for this from a passage in which al-Bāqillānī discusses obstacles to sound reasoning (al-Bāqillānī, *Taqrīr*, pp. 216–19). Siddiqui has also cited the passage from the *Tamhīd* discussed above, in which al-Bāqillānī enumerates the types of *istidlāl*, but I do not find reference to the probabilistic nature of acquired knowledge there. It appears that Siddiqui may have conflated al-Bāqillānī’s acknowledgement that reasoning can be faulty with the metaphysical notion that *dalīl* and *madlūl* are not necessarily connected – the latter a belief which is foreign to al-Bāqillānī’s way of thinking. Although he acknowledges that some *naẓar*, being faulty, leads the reasoner to sophisms (*shubha*) rather than *dalīl*, and therefore to ignorance (see *Taqrīb*, vol. 1, p. 210), this does not render the relationship between *dalīl* (when it is obtained) and *madlūl* a contingent one. See Siddiqui, *Law and Politics under the Abbasids*, Chapter 3.

21 Al-Anṣārī, *Ghunya*, vol. 1, p. 125.

22 For a delineation of the various positions on this question, see al-Anṣārī, *Ghunya*, vol. 1, pp. 554–58, and al-Āmidī, *Abkār al-afkār*, vol. 1, p. 95.

23 More generally, the notion responds to the realisation that some knowledge items are inseparable one from the other: our knowledge of our knowledge of *x*, for instance, is impossible in the absence of our knowledge of *x* (see the references in the previous note). Epistemological concerns here drive an ontological position.

in this way to maintain the reality of logical necessity without in anyway compromising God's exclusive agency as the cause of knowledge.²⁴

Knowledge Must Be Acquired Subsequent to Sound Reasoning

It should be clear by this point that al-Juwaynī does not conceive of the relationship between sound reasoning and knowledge as one of pure contingency, dependent entirely on God's habit, as seems to be the position of al-Ījī at least. A dispute that al-Juwaynī entertains with al-Isfarā'īnī allows us to relate al-Juwaynī's beliefs concerning logical necessity more comprehensively to his theory of God's creation of knowledge.²⁵ The relevant discussion is over the question of whether items of discursive knowledge can be obtained without a preceding act-accident of *naẓar*. The answers correspond to two possible positions on the relationship between God's creation of the act of reasoning and His creation of the accident of knowledge, as follows.

- Position 1: God creates an accident of power (*qudra muḥdatha*) by which the person acquires the act-accident of reasoning (*naẓar*) also created by God. Subsequently, God creates an accident of power by which the person acquires the accident of knowledge (*ilm*) also created by God.
- Position 2: God creates an accident of power (*qudra muḥdatha*) by which the person acquires the act-accident of reasoning (*naẓar*) also created by God. Subsequently, God creates an accident of knowledge (*ilm*).

Position 1, which al-Juwaynī ascribes to 'the majority of the rightly minded (*muẓam al-muḥaqqiqīn*)' makes discursive knowledge the acquisition of the reasoner. According to the second position, knowledge items which

24 In a later work on jurisprudence, *Al-Burhān*, al-Juwaynī explicitly states that the *dalīl* is a mental process, rather than an extramental accident. On this, see Shihadeh, 'The Argument from Ignorance', pp. 205–6. This seems a natural progression from al-Juwaynī's implicit distinction between the reasoning process and logical relations, which are what necessitate knowledge, already suggested in his notion of *wajh al-dalīl*. Shihadeh has demonstrated that al-Juwaynī's solution was not immediately well received, but that it was a building block for al-Rāzī's later critique of the epistemological principles of earlier *kalām*.

25 Al-Juwaynī was taught *kalām* by al-Isfarā'īnī at the *madrasa* of al-Bayhaqī but was already deeply immersed in the thought of al-Bāqillānī (see Siddiqui, *Law and Politics under the Abbasids*, pp. 55–56). Al-Juwaynī's discussions frequently capture disagreements between the two.

occur after reasoning ‘occur necessarily (*taqā‘ ḍarūratan*)’ in accordance with certain causes (*asbāb*): yet ‘the establishment of [these knowledge items] is not conditioned upon the preceding [existence] of these causes; rather, [God’s] custom determines this, just as it determines all other causes (*itrādahā fī sār al-asbāb*)’.²⁶ This specific dispute, then, concerns the relationship between the act-accident of reasoning and the subsequent knowledge. Al-Juwaynī agrees with other school members that knowledge, like reasoning, is an acquisition of the reasoner. This does not add much to what we have already learnt about al-Juwaynī’s denial that reasoning is the cause of knowledge. It is in his subsequent discussion of this point that al-Juwaynī’s difference with al-Isfarā‘īnī emerges. He writes:

Acquired, discursive knowledge (*al-ilm al-maqdūr al-mustadall ‘alayhi*) which is sought through proofs (*al-maṭlūb bi-l-adilla*) cannot be established on the assumption that it occurs as an object of acquired power without the creation of power for *naẓar*.²⁷

This he describes as a majority position among the *mutakallimūn*, including al-Bāqillānī, but he singles out al-Isfarā‘īnī as having maintained that ‘acquired discursive knowledge may be established as an object of power without the precedence of reasoning (*naẓar wa-istidlāl*)’.²⁸ Richard M. Frank has edited relevant portions of al-Juwaynī’s *Kitāb al-shāmil* and treated this passage in passing in his excellent study on the foundations of religious belief among the classical Ash‘arīs. There he has held that the discussion over whether or not acquired knowledge may occur without preceding reasoning pertains to ‘a difference of view concerning how the knowledge of the truth of the conclusion follows from the reasoning’, but he has written that ‘the matter is too complex to go into here’.²⁹ Frank has also claimed in the course of the study that, for al-Juwaynī, despite his insistence on the religious imperative of reasoning in arriving at knowledge of God, ‘this is not to say that God cannot cause a person to have such knowledge without his having performed any antecedent reasoning, but only in fact

26 Al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-shāmil* (1969), p. 111. Abrahamov, in his study of necessary knowledge in Islamic theology, has acknowledged this discussion. He has written that, although most theologians understood necessary knowledge to be that which occurs without speculation, ‘it should be noted, notwithstanding, that a few theologians regard knowledge resulting from a process of speculation as necessary knowledge, and hence, as an object of man’s power’ (Abrahamov, ‘Necessary Knowledge’, p. 21). I will argue that it is in fact al-Juwaynī’s position which preserves a necessary link between sound reasoning and the acquisition of knowledge, in contrast to the alternative.

27 Al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-shāmil* (1969), pp. 111–12.

28 Al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-shāmil* (1969), p. 112.

29 Frank, ‘Knowledge and *taqlīd*’, p. 54, n. 54.

that he normally does not'.³⁰ It is indeed true that al-Juwaynī is committed to occasionalism and that he therefore maintains that God could directly create knowledge, which is normally an acquisition of human power, with no associated accident of *qudra*. However, al-Juwaynī clearly and repeatedly denies that God could create this kind of knowledge as an object of power, with an associated accident of *qudra*, but without the precedence of an act-accident of *nazar*. The table below illustrates this point. *T* represents an atomic moment.

Table 5.1 Scenarios for the relationship between created reasoning and created knowledge

	Is this scenario possible?	Does this occur regularly by God's custom?
Scenario 1 T1: Creation of accident of capacity (<i>qudra</i>) + creation of associated accident of reasoning (<i>nazar</i>). T2: Creation of accident of capacity (<i>qudra</i>) + creation of associated item of knowledge (<i>ilm muktasab</i>)	Yes	Yes
Scenario 2 T1: No related accident created. T2: Direct creation of accident of knowledge (<i>ilm</i>) normally acquired through reason (for example, knowledge of God's existence)	Yes	No
Scenario 3 T1: No related accident created. T2: Creation of accident of capacity (<i>qudra</i>) + creation of associated item of knowledge (<i>ilm muktasab</i>)	No	No

Despite the fact that al-Juwaynī firmly maintains that all knowledge is at all times the creation of God, he also maintains that it is metaphysically impossible for a human to acquire knowledge as an object of God-given capacity where reasoning does not occur. This is because of the reality of logical necessity. Al-Juwaynī argues for the metaphysical impossibility of

30 Frank, 'Knowledge and *taqlīd*', p. 54.

the acquisition of knowledge in the absence of *naẓar* three times in the extant portions of the *Shāmīl*. In the first passage, al-Juwaynī argues against al-Isfarāʿīnī as follows:

Argument A: *Naẓar* is connected with (*murtabiṭ bi*) knowledge. It is impossible that sound *naẓar* is obtained and that an accident of ignorance (*jahl*) follows. Just as sound *naẓar* cannot be followed by ignorance, it is not possible for acquired knowledge to occur without a preceding act of *naẓar*.

Argument B: If acquired knowledge could occur without proof (*dalīl*), this would cause our arguments against the imitator (*muqallid*) to fail. If we allow the obtainment of knowledge as an object of power without proof, what prevents the belief of the *muqallid* being defined as knowledge?³¹

Another passage that also appears among Frank's collated extracts concerns the distinct but closely related question of whether knowledge which is normally immediate can be created as an object of power. Al-Juwaynī's conclusions here are entirely consistent with the arguments above and again place him in opposition to his reported view of al-Isfarāʿīnī. Al-Juwaynī maintains that items of immediate knowledge which are part of the constitution of a sound intellect (for instance, my knowledge of my own existence) can never be objects of power.³² Immediate knowledge which is not constitutive of the sound intellect may be acquired: yet al-Juwaynī insists, against al-Isfarāʿīnī, that it must be preceded by proof (*dalīl*, whether rational or revelation-based) in order to be considered an acquisition of the human. This is not because human reasoning has any causal efficacy in relation to the knowledge acquired. Indeed, al-Juwaynī clearly insists in the *Shāmīl* that the accident of power associated with the acquired knowledge has no causal efficacy in relation to that knowledge. It is, rather, impossible for knowledge which is normally immediate to be acquired in the absence of proof, for the same reason that it is impossible for knowledge which is normally acquired by proof to be acquired in the absence of proof. This is because it undermines the whole basis of Ash'arī

31 Al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-shāmīl* (1981), pp. 14–15, within the chapter on the relation between *naẓar* and *ʿilm*.

32 On al-Juwaynī's concession to the definition of intellect as a collection of items of necessary knowledge in *Kitāb al-irshād*, as well as his later progression to an alternative perspective, see Siddiqui, *Law and Politics under the Abbasids*, p. 118.

rationality, since, as al-Juwaynī asks again here: ‘How do you know that the *muqallid* does not [in fact] know?’³³

From al-Juwaynī’s point of view, if knowledge can be acquired without reasoning, reasoning cannot be said to entail knowledge. And if reasoning does not entail knowledge, the Ash‘arī insistence on reasoning over mere imitation is groundless. Al-Juwaynī, for all his commitment to the doctrine of divine freedom, acknowledges a restriction on the exercise of God’s power in order to secure his foundationalist rationalism. For if God cannot cause a human to acquire knowledge without also creating reasoning – that is, if he cannot create for the human being an acquisition of knowledge of the *madlūl* without simultaneously creating an acquisition of knowledge of the *wajh al-dalīl* – then there is a course of action which is impossible for God. Even on the understanding that a single created accident of knowledge has as its objects both *wajh al-dalīl* and *madlūl*, and indeed that the very definition of the former demands its concurrence and identification with the latter, al-Juwaynī realises that accidents of *nazar* must also be created. This is because the *wajh al-dalīl* is part of both the reasoning process and of the resultant knowledge. Thus, it is inconceivable that the creation of acquired knowledge can occur without the prior creation of *nazar*. Furthermore, this inconceivability refers to a metaphysical impossibility. If God is to be rationally known, He cannot interfere in the efficacy of sound reasoning, either by failing to create knowledge in its wake, or by creating human capacity to acquire knowledge without prior reasoning. This gives primacy to rationality in a manner that befits the epistemic confidence of the Ash‘arīs. Relationships of logical necessity demand the metaphysical necessity that God create sound reasoning together with the knowledge that results.

There is a crucial parallel context which has recently received revived scholarly interest: in al-Juwaynī’s later work, *al-‘Aqīda al-Niẓāmiyya*, al-Juwaynī expresses the position that it must be the case that God-created capacity (*al-quḍra al-ḥāditha*) is the cause of the human act.³⁴ For the purposes of this chapter, it is worth noting the particular motivating factor in al-Juwaynī’s concession to this point. This is the imperative for the obligations imposed by God to be meaningful. The reason that it is inconceivable

33 Al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-shāmil* (1981), pp. 96–97. On page 89, he states that since man is commanded to know God and can only be commanded to do something which is an object of his power (*maqḍūr*), human knowledge of God must be acquired as an object of power.

34 Gimaret has treated this in *Theories de l’acte humain*, pp. 120–28; Shihadeh has touched on it in *The Teleological Ethics*, pp. 39–40; Khaled el-Rouayheb has discussed the development in *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 296–97. See also Ramli, ‘Ash‘arism through an Akbarī Lens’, pp. 389–94.

for the power of the agent to be unrelated to his acts is precisely that this would 'nullify the demands of the law' (*fī al-maṣīr ilā annahu lā atharan li-qudrat al-'abd fī fī'lihi qaṭ' ṭalabāt al-sharā'i*).³⁵ Nevertheless, al-Juwaynī strongly distinguishes his view from that of the Mut'azila by arguing that God remains ultimately responsible for the act, both in His creation of the capacity to enact it and in His volition, which determines those capacities that He creates. This position in the *'Aqida* is strongly related to al-Juwaynī's disagreement with al-Isfarā'īnī as recorded in the *Shāmil*. In both cases, it is the demands of the Law that are in the background of al-Juwaynī's admission of minimal pockets of necessity. If humans are warned against unreasoned belief, there must be a way to guarantee the efficacy of reason. If humans are commanded to worship, there must be a way to guarantee the efficacy of the human in the act of worship. Otherwise, the task of the rational theologian and jurist loses its purpose.

Conclusion

Al-Juwaynī's denial of God's power to create acquired knowledge within His creatures without an associated accident of reason is more than a technicality concerning the mechanism of knowledge production. His insistence on the presence of reasoning in the process of knowledge acquisition absolutely befits the elevated status given by the *mutakallimūn* to human reason in the search for knowledge of God. Ash'arī foundationalism places enormous confidence in the capacity of human reason to obtain knowledge about the nature of the unseen. Yet some Ash'arīs, including al-Isfarā'īnī and later al-Ījī, insisted on a metaphysics which attempted, simultaneously, to eliminate all necessity from the created order, even in the process of knowledge acquisition. It turns out that these two major concerns may really be incompatible. The elimination of all necessity makes it impossible to reliably establish knowledge of divine freedom. Classical Ash'arīs including al-Juwaynī held to an epistemology that admitted the imperative for necessity within the system. For God to be known at all, they realised, His creation of sound reasoning together with acquired knowledge must be a metaphysical certainty beyond the reliability of His habit.

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35 Al-Juwaynī, *Al-'Aqida al-Niẓāmiyya*, pp. 43–45.

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CHAPTER 6

Mass Transmission of Prophetic Miracles in the Contemplation and Proof of Core Creed

Aaron Spevack

Introduction

Theologians often think that the purpose of theology is to demonstrate the core tenets of faith to another who has yet to believe. Others, however, may consider it primarily defensive and apologetic, providing its practitioner with proof against doubt, or with a weapon against a challenger. The first conception of theology speaks to the question of what plants faith in the heart. The second speaks to the question of what ensures that faith remains in the heart of one who already believes. Furthermore, regardless of whether this faith will remain or be prone to wavering or disappearing, the question of whether one must be able to produce proofs for one's belief and thereby establish its salvific validity has complicated the question of theology's purpose. If theology proves faith to the non-believer and buttresses or saves faith for the wavering believer, why must the firm believer learn theological proofs and what is at stake if said firm believer fails to learn to express their faith evidentially? Further still, what if the effort to learn such proofs leads to wavering and scepticism rather than a firm footing and certainty?

The late Ash'arī *kalām* tradition, as laid out in popular introductory and intermediate madrasa textbooks, often presents what we might call the modified Sanūsian view of Islamic theology: it plants the seed of faith in the non-believer, buttresses the faith of the believer and absolves the believer of the sin of unverified adherence (*taqlīd*). It is modified because it labels the adherent (*muqallid*) sinful and at risk of wavering faith, but not a disbeliever as was Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Sanūsī's (d. 895/1490) view.¹

1 See Spevack, 'Continuing Conversations', pp. 231ff. Also see El Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth-Century*, pp. 189ff.

Regardless of what is at stake for the uncritical adherent in the afterlife, how one exits from the status of being a uncritical adherent (*muqallid*) is usually charted as a series of proofs beginning with the demonstrative proof (*burhān*) for God's existence, followed by the attributes of negation (*al-ṣifāt al-salbiyya*),² and then the attributes of meaning (*ṣifāt al-ma'ānī*).³ Next, the Prophet's attributes⁴ are laid out as either textual or rational proofs, and at the tail end of the discussion mention is made that miracles entail divine confirmation of the truthfulness of the messengers. I call this the Sanūsian ordering of proofs, and one finds it explicitly laid out in al-Sanūsī's *kalām* works, as well as in versified summaries, such as the *Murshid al-mu'īn* of 'Abd al-Wāḥid b. Aḥmad Ibn 'Āshir (d. 1040/1631) and *Jawharat al-tawḥīd* of Ibrāhīm al-Laḡānī (d. 1041/1631).

This chapter, however, treats an alternative path to membership in the community of reflective evidentialists (*ahl al-naẓar wa-l-istidlāl*) who have left uncritical adherence and shored up their faith against doubt through rational means that do not, however, arise from an ability to produce logically ordered proofs for God's existence and other attributes. Through an analysis of three verifiers (*muḥaqqiqūn*) of the late Ash'arī tradition – Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 793/1390), 'Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1355) and al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413) – I argue that such scholars maintained the rationalist foundation of Qur'an-based faith through the epistemological channel of mass transmission coupled with the rationalist proof of prophetic truthfulness. In doing so, such scholars thereby considered any believer who was incapable of providing rationally demonstrable propositions that prove God's existence and necessary attributes to be free of the sin of uncritical adherence.⁵

Obtaining the Salvific Root of Faith (*aṣl al-īmān*) and Meeting the Obligation to Know Allah (*wujūb al-ma'rifa*)

Before exploring the question of establishing mass transmission's efficacy in exiting one from uncritical adherence and entering one into the community of reflective evidentialists, we must first distinguish between two matters: proofs that bring one from non-belief to belief and proofs that bring one from belief based on uncritical adherence to belief rooted in rational reflection and evidence. Identifying the initial state of the one

2 The attributes of negation are beginningless eternity, endless eternity, independence, dissimilarity and oneness.

3 The attributes of meaning are power, will, knowledge, life, hearing, seeing and speech.

4 The four necessary attributes of prophets are honesty, faithfulness (that is, being free of sin), conveyance of the message, and brilliance.

5 See al-Ghursī, *Al-Tahrīr al-ḥamīd*, pp. 126–41.

whom the proofs are intended to convince helps distinguish which proofs are required in a given context and, by extension, whether those proofs are necessary for one to know and express.

The dominant opinion found in standard Ash'arī theological handbooks is that the first obligation of the morally accountable person (*al-mukallaf*) is to know God (*wujūb al-ma'rifa*). Discussions around this obligation are often centred on whether this obligation is upon every rational adult, regardless of whether they have been reached by the message of the prophet of their time, or whether the obligation is only on those who have been reached by the prophet of their time. The former opinion is attributed to the Mu'tazilī and Māturidī schools, and the latter is attributed to the Ash'arī school. Regardless of the salvific aspect of this obligation, what is of primary importance for the investigation at hand is to know through which epistemological channel knowledge of God is realised.

Three Categories of Tenets Based on Epistemological Channels

Al-Sanūsī, Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) and others give a tripartite division of points of creed according to the epistemological channels through which they are made known. Understanding these categories of tenets is important as the efficacy of their epistemological channels differs according to whether we are considering the movement from non-belief to belief, or the movement from belief based on uncritical adherence of narration to evidentialist belief based on rational reflection.⁶ Drawing from al-Sanūsī's commentary on his *al-'Aqīda al-kubrā*, with explanatory commentary drawn from other sources, the epistemological channels are as follows:

(1) Tenets Rooted in Rationality ('aqlī)

These tenets can only be proven by means of absolutely certain rational proofs (*dalīl 'aqlī qaṭ'ī*). These points of creed are those on which the establishment of miracles are based – namely, God's existence, beginningless eternity, endless eternity, power, will, knowledge and life. Were one to attempt to establish belief in these attributes by revelation alone, it would

6 That is, whether reason alone or revelation alone is sufficient to produce the root of faith in the non-believer or to produce reasoned evidentialist faith in the uncritical adherent will differ according to each category. Reason alone is all that is sufficient to produce belief in God's existence for the non-believer, and revelation is not sufficient if the veracity of a prophet has not yet been determined. Revelation alone is sufficient regarding belief in the origination of the universe for one who has already affirmed the veracity of a prophet.

entail circular reasoning. One cannot say ‘God exists because the Qur’an says God said that He exists’, when it has not yet been proven that the divine source of the Qur’an exists. The above-mentioned points of creed may only be established *via* the epistemological channel of reason.

In justifying his claim that theology (*‘ilm al-kalām*)⁷ is the foundation of foundational sources (*asās al-asās*), Ibrāhīm al-Bājūrī (d. 1276/1860) lays out a chain of foundational dependencies in his gloss on al-Taftāzānī’s commentary on the creed of al-Nasafi: knowledge connected with legal rulings is derived from the Qur’an and Hadith, which are dependent on the truthfulness of the Messenger (*ṣidq al-rasūl*), which is known from the miracles reported of him, which are considered God’s affirmation of the Prophet’s claim and can only be produced by one who has the attributes of power, knowledge, will, life and so on, and the existence of such a being possessing of these attributes is only known *via* the science of God’s oneness and attributes (that is, *kalām*).⁸

According to scholars writing in the Sanūsian tradition, the root of faith can only be acquired through rational reflection and proof. The first half of the testification of faith – that there is no god but God – is acquired through a composite of contemplation of the universe’s temporal origination and dependency on a creator (*dalīl al-ḥudūth*), its contingency on a necessary being (*dalīl al-imkān*) who ensures its perfect order and design (*dalīl al-niẓām*) and others,⁹ while the second half of the testification of faith – that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God – is acquired through contemplation of the contingency of prophetic miracles on the Creator’s willful response to prophetic claims *via* His creative act. Both parts of the testimony of faith, when viewed from the perspective of someone witnessing a prophetic miracle, are grounded in observing the natural world – both its predictable patterns and miraculous interruptions in causality (see below) – and reasoning from these to the existence of the Creator, who

7 In the broad sense of *‘ilm al-tawḥīd wa-l-ṣifāt* and not merely the subtle philosophical discussions (*daqā’iq al-kalām*). Al-Bājūrī, like al-Taftāzānī and some other later scholars, does not distinguish between *‘ilm al-kalām* and *‘ilm al-tawḥīd wa-l-ṣifāt*, unlike al-Suyūṭī.

8 Al-Bājūrī, *Hāshiya al-Bājūrī ‘alā Sharḥ al-‘aqa’id al-Nasafiyya*, p. 88. I have maintained the tone of the original Arabic, despite its awkward grammatical quality in English, in order to keep the sense of connectedness between each link that serves as the foundation for the next. The science of Islamic theology is the foundation of knowledge of the Qur’an and Hadith, which are the foundational sources for all ethical and theological teachings. As such, it is the foundation of the foundations.

9 The belief in God and His attributes is a composite of proofs, beginning with the proofs for His Existence – which includes both the proof from temporal origination and the proof from contingency – followed by the proofs for the attributes of negation, and then the attributes of meaning. That is, on this commonly cited opinion, the proof for the first half of the testification of faith is a composite of the Sanūsian ordering of proofs.

validates the truthfulness of his messenger. After this affirmation it then becomes clear that, according to some of the scholars discussed later, all other points of faith may be taken directly from revelation, which is the second category of creed listed below.

There is some discussion as to whether one must first reason to the Creator's existence and then reason to the veracity of the messengers. Some¹⁰ have argued that both tenets – existence of God and truthfulness of the messenger – are delivered simultaneously¹¹ by the miraculous proofs for the veracity of the messengers.¹² Nevertheless, the language of al-Bājūrī and others writing in the Sanūsian tradition prioritises proofs for the Creator, followed by proofs for the veracity of the messengers.

(2) *Tenets Rooted in Reported and Revealed Knowledge (naqlī)*

The second category of creedal tenets as laid out by al-Juwaynī and al-Sanūsī are those that can only be obtained by means of revelation (*al-samī* or *al-naqlī*), since in these matters the intellect can merely judge them to be rationally possible. Their actual occurrence can only be known through reported evidentiary knowledge or what Abu Ḥaṣṣ al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142), al-Taftāzānī and others call 'the truthful report' (*al-khabar al-ṣādiq*), or 'the report of the truthful one' (*khabar al-ṣādiq*). Examples include matters related to the afterlife such as resurrection, the questioning angels in the

10 Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Ghursī notes: '[...] then I saw the verifier al-Marjānī take this opinion is his gloss on al-Dawānī's *Commentary on the Creed of 'Aḍud al-Dīn* [al-Ījī] wherein he said, "that the first of the obligations is affirmation of the Messenger"'. Al-Ghursī, *Hāshiya Badr al-tamām*, p. 62.

11 That is, realisation of the veracity of the message rests on the existence of one who sends the message to the messenger. The message-sender and the message-receiver are logically entailed by the affirmation of the veracity of the message. Or we can say that the affirmation of message-receiver (that is, the messenger) entails the affirmation of the message-sender, as the concept of message-receiver entails the concept of message-sender. Al-Ghursī, *Hāshiya*, p. 62.

12 Prophetic miracles are breaks in the links of causality that occur as support to a person's claim to prophecy, such as Moses' staff turning into a snake (Q. 7:107, 20:20, 26:32). The idea being that, if one who did not believe in God (or who did, but did not know if the messenger was genuine) were to witness Moses' staff turning into a snake, they would reason that such a change from staff to snake could not occur, except that it was brought about by an existent being with will, power, knowledge and life and that this being with these attributes produced this miraculous effect to affirm Moses' claim to prophecy. This is similar to an atheist reflecting on the emergent and contingent nature of the heavens and earth and reasoning to their having a creator, except that a prophetic claim is coupled with the affirmation of a person's claim to prophecy because that particular emergent and contingent aspect of the heavens or the earth – in this case, the staff-turned-snake – could only have been brought into being by an existent being with will, power, knowledge and life as support to a person's claim to prophecy.

grave, the bridge over Hell, the scale (of deeds), reward, punishment, Heaven and Hell. With the intellect having affirmed the rational possibility of such matters and then engaged only in the domain of clarification and interpretation of these points of creed thereafter, their acceptance as established fact (*thubūt*) is rooted in the affirmation of the veracity of the messengers.

That these points of creed are obtained from revelation and cannot be determined *via* the unaided intellect can give the impression that they are purely textual (*naqlī*) proofs. However, it should be remembered that epistemological value is first determined by being truthfully reported from a truthful reporter; their status as truthfully reported revelation is established *via* the purely rational proof for the veracity of the messengers as mentioned previously. That they are called reported (*naqlī*) and revelatory (*samī*) is due to their proximate premises (*al-muqaddimāt al-qarība*) being based on textual sources, while the foundational premises that preceded them are in fact purely rational. For this reason, Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Ghursī, a contemporary verifier from the *taḥqīqī* tradition, calls them ‘reported yet rooted in rational proofs’ (*al-naqlī al-mustanid bi-l-‘aqlī*).¹³

The historiographical dimension of Sunnī epistemology also enters this category, in that the verification of a true report’s (*al-khabar al-ṣādiq*) being authentically narrated from the truthful reporter (the Prophet) who was aided by prophetic miracles only occurs *via* an assessment of the chain of narration (*isnād*). Short Sanūsian summary texts such as *Umm al-barāhīn*, *al-Kharīda*, *Murshid al-muʾīn*, *Risālat al-Bājūrī* and *Jawharat al-tawḥīd* tend to list a few points of creed that are mass-transmitted, or nearly so, while tenets rooted in singularly narrated texts are not considered to reach the levels of certainty obtained through mass transmission, albeit not excluded entirely.

In summary, the tenets in this category are known – after the death of a given messenger – *via* multiple steps and are, therefore, in actuality a composite of rational and reported knowledge. That is, the claim that ‘there will be a Day of Resurrection’ is rationally possible, but known with certainty, as it is found in the Qur’an, a divinely revealed book. The Qur’an’s revelatory status is known because it was delivered by a prophet whose claims to prophecy were supported by divine evidentiary miracles; the existence of that prophet and his divine evidentiary miracles is known through mass-transmitted reports.

Restated, a simplified order of operations can be summarised as follows:

- Report-based claim: ‘There will be a Day of Resurrection’.
- Report-based proof: It is stated in the Qur’an, ‘Nay, I swear by the Day of Resurrection’ (Q. 75:1).

13 Al-Ghursī, *Taḥrīr*, pp. 135–37.

- Rational claim: ‘Everything stated in the Qur’an is true’.
- Rational proof: That the veracity of a statement found in the Qur’an is true rests on the proof of the existence and necessity of a creator who possesses power, will, knowledge and life, coupled with the proof of prophecy that says that one who claims prophecy and manifests miraculous breaks in the links of causality in support of his claim is affirmed by the existent and necessary creator who produces the miraculous breaks in the links of causality as a testimony to the veracity of the person’s claim to prophecy.

From the above, we understand that a report-based claim (*naqlī*) is in fact rooted in a rational claim, and as such, it actually is in the category of doctrines that are ‘reported yet rooted in rational proofs’ (*al-naqlī al-mustanid bi-l-‘aqlī*).

We can add to this an important additional claim: such a person who claimed prophecy and manifested miracles did in fact live at one point in history, and he recited the Qur’an, which contains the above point of doctrine that can only be known with certainty through that which is ‘reported yet rooted in rational proofs’.

- Mass-transmitted report-based claim: A man named Muḥammad existed over 1,400 years ago and claimed prophecy, recited the Qur’an and produced miracles.

We will return to this particular type of truthfully reported claim, the veracity of which rests not on a single truthful reporter aided by miracles (that is, a prophet) but rather a critical mass of reporters in every generation who, conventionally (*‘ādatan*),¹⁴ could not have conspired to lie about this truthful reporter aided by miracles.¹⁵

(3) *Tenets Rooted in Either Rational or Revealed Knowledge* (‘aqlī or naqlī)

The third category of doctrinal points of creed are those that can be validly established either *via* rational proofs or reported proofs: namely, those

14 The epistemological value of convention (*‘āda*) is that it produces certainty when the observed phenomenon is constant and continuous (*muṭṭarida*) but not when merely predominantly the case (*ghālība*). One can have certainty that the Atlantic Ocean consists of water, even if it is rationally conceivable that it might be replaced with pudding. One cannot have certainty that the weather in southern California will be warm year-round, even if the odds are likely that it will be.

15 Al-Nasafī writes: ‘The mass-transmitted report is the report established on the tongues of a people for whom conspiring [on a false report] is inconceivable’. Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharh ‘aqā’id al-Nasafīyya*, p. 38.

doctrinal tenets which neither provide the foundation for establishing prophetic miracles (that is, not 1 above) nor whose occurrence is merely possible (that is, not 2 above). By way of example, tenets which do not provide the foundation for belief in prophetic miracles include the last three of the seven attributes of meaning – namely, hearing, seeing and speech. These may be deduced rationally, but they may also be accepted based on revelation without any circular reasoning. Furthermore, that the resurrection is rationally possible and not necessary or impossible can be known with certainty through rational deduction, or due to its mention in the Qur'an.¹⁶

In summary, al-Juwaynī and al-Sanūsī and those who followed them in this matter categorised the tenets of faith into those that can only be known *via* purely rational contemplation, those that can only be known *via* reported and revealed knowledge, and those that could be known through either channel.

Each of the three categories of tenets listed above helps to answer the question of 'how is the root of faith acquired for each core point of creed?' Some are acquired by the mind alone, others purely through revelation reported from a prophet which is itself originally rooted in rational premises, and still others may be known *via* either rational or revealed channels. Meeting the obligation to know God (*wujūb al-ma'rifa*) is met by obtaining the root of faith in Him *via* purely rational demonstration. Likewise, obtaining the root of faith in the veracity of the Prophet's claim to prophecy is also obtained through purely rational means, as discussed above.

Al-Ījī and al-Jurjānī's *Tahqīq*: There Are Only Two Categories, the Purely Rational and the Reported Based on the Rational

As noted previously, doctrinal points from the category of purely revealed tenets (2 above) are not actually purely reported knowledge, for certainty-producing reported knowledge is of two categories:

1. Mass transmission (*tawātur*).
2. The report of a prophet who is aided by miracles (*khabar al-rasūl al-mu'ayyad bi-l-mu'jiza*).

16 The difference between this claim and the one mentioned in category 2 above is that what is being affirmed here is the mere rational possibility of the resurrection, not the establishment that there will be a resurrection. The claim that 'it is rationally possible for God to resurrect all humans that ever lived' can be affirmed either through rational contemplation without reference to the Qur'an or by reading in the Qur'an that there will be a day of resurrection and therefore, since God would not affirm something rationally impossible, the original claim holds true that 'it is rationally possible for God to resurrect all humans that ever lived'.

The first category, mass transmission (*tawātur*), is deemed certain in that the sheer number of reporters in each link of the chain of transmission is so great that they could not have conspired upon a lie. Such a point of certain knowledge is purely reported yet non-revelatory knowledge, as the epistemological status of mass transmission is not dependent on its containing reports of miracles or revelatory matters. That is, the knowledge that comes from it would not be *ipso facto* revealed (*samī*), as any event whose occurrence is mass-transmitted, such as Martin Luther King's March on Washington, falls under the category of mass-transmitted certain knowledge.

Mass-transmitted reports produce certainty, but this certain knowledge is not yet revelatory.¹⁷ Mass-transmitted reports that are revelatory are from the second category of certainty-producing reported knowledge – namely, the report of a prophet who is aided by miracles (*khābar al-rasūl al-mu'ayyad bi-l-mu'jiza*) – and it is knowledge from this category with which al-Sanūsī and al-Juwaynī are primarily concerned in their classification scheme.

However, some verifiers of the Ash'arī school – that is, al-Ījī and al-Jūrjānī – have pointed out that any tenet that is purely based on the report of a prophet who is aided by miracles is not based on a purely narrative epistemological channel. Rather, it is in fact a hybrid of rational and reported knowledge, for the veracity of such a report is not based on the principle of mass transmission but rather the following rational argument: when a person (a) claims prophecy and (b) produces a break in the links of causality in response to a challenge to that claim to prophecy, then the occurrence of such a miraculous break in the links of causality can only be brought about by an existent creator with power, will, knowledge and life, who affirms the prophetic claim through bringing about said miracle. As mentioned above and clarified in what follows, tenets rooted in such reports are called 'reported' and 'revealed' because their proximate premises are purely reported (*naqlī*), even though their distant foundational premises are purely rational.

17 One might argue that this is still not purely reported knowledge, for the veracity and authenticity of such a report is determined through the rational deduction that the sheer number of reporters excludes the possibility, conventionally (*ādatan*), of their collusion to report a lie. Further research is necessary to determine if mass transmission of non-revelatory knowledge can be called purely reported (*naqlī*) or not, since the principle that determines its epistemological value is based on convention and not rational necessity, although it is arrived at through rational deduction. That is, mass transmission's epistemological status of being certainty-producing is arrived at through rational deduction that conventionally true facts produce certainty. It is therefore also rooted in rational proofs and conventional premises.

Combining and summarising the words of al-Ījī and al-Jurjānī, al-Ghursī narrates:

A demonstrative proof is either:

1. rational in all of its premises;
2. reported (*naqlī*) in all of its premises;
3. or a composite of both.

The first is called 'rational' (*'aqlī*). The second is inconceivable since the veracity of the narrator is a necessary condition and it is not established except *via* the intellect (*'aql*). The third is that which we call reported (*naqlī*), since it relies on reported knowledge (*al-naql*) in general. So, the demonstrative proof is limited to two categories: purely rational and a composite of rational and reported. That is the verified opinion (*al-tahqīq*) [...].¹⁸

With that, affirming the existence of the Creator and affirming the veracity of a prophet are the results of rational reflective evidentiary processes (*naẓar*) and, therefore, produce the root of faith in one who previously did not believe. As discussed below, such proofs also serve to exit the uncritical adherent (*muqallid*) from uncritical adherence (*taqlid*).

Distinguishing between the types of proofs (*istidlāl*) that bring one from non-belief to belief is related to the question of uncritical adherence in creed, but it is important to emphasise that the theologians differentiated between the process of moving from non-belief to belief and moving from faith based on uncritical adherence to faith based on reflection and evidence. Purely rational proofs (category 1 above) produce the root of faith that is belief in God and the prophethood of the prophets and remove the uncritical adherent from the blameworthy state of uncritical adherence. Yet, proofs whose immediate or proximate premises (*al-muqaddimāt al-qarība*) are purely transmitted (category 2 above) cannot produce the root of faith, as one must first believe in the veracity of a claimant to prophecy before accepting what said prophet reports. Such proofs based on

18 The passage continues to discuss some additional details of how certain tenets can be either rationally deduced or known *via* revelatory reports, including the contingency of the universe since it is conceivable that the root of faith in God's existence might first be obtained from the proof of the contingency of the universe (*dalīl al-imkān*) and its necessary reliance on a creator, followed by the proofs for prophecy, after which one could learn from the prophet that the universe had a beginning. Here an Avicennan proof might establish God's existence, whereas a reported proof would establish the core tenet of the origination and finitude of the universe, against the Peripatetics. Al-Ghursī, *Tahqīr*, p. 138.

reported knowledge, however, can produce sound faith in matters which are merely possible (category 2), or belief in divine names and attributes which are not connected to proofs of prophecy (category 3), but only in the case of someone who has already affirmed the existence of God and the prophethood of the Prophet.

The upshot is that knowledge transmitted from prophets *via* reference to the scriptures that they recite is not sufficient to produce the root of sound faith, until the existence of the sender of scriptures (*al-mursil*) and the veracity of the claim to the prophecy of the recipient of scriptures (*al-mursal*) are rationally proven. Once the rationally necessary evidence has been accepted, then reference to scripture is sufficient; however, even if the proximate premises of one's proof are rooted only in scriptural evidence, such premises are preceded by the rational proofs for prophecy and as such are in fact hybrid proofs consisting of distant rational premises embedded in the proximate scriptural premises.

What remains to be determined is the relationship of creedal tenets obtained by each of these three categories of proofs to the problem of uncritical adherence (*taqlīd*).

Meeting the Obligation to Reflect (*wujūb al-naẓar*) and Removing One from Uncritical Adherence

After having met the obligation to know God (*wujūb al-marīfa*), the next obligation that is discussed in the standard textbooks consists of the obligation to reflect on this knowledge and found one's faith in reasoned evidentialism (*wujūb al-naẓar*). One who fails to meet this obligation is charged with basing their beliefs on knowledge reported by others without contemplating these beliefs nor being able to rationally demonstrate their veracity. A further debate ensues as to whether such a person who uncritically adheres to the beliefs of others is sinful, and if sinful, whether such a person is saved or not. Even in the view that such a person is a sinful believer and therefore ultimately saved, the overarching question under consideration is whether rational proofs are required for all core points of creed in order to remove one from the status of being an uncritical adherent, or whether reliance on revelation (*naql*) is sufficient after the root of faith in God and the Prophet is obtained through rational reflection and proof.

The science of *kalām* in its broadest and most inclusive sense of being the science of monotheism and divine attributes (*ilm al-tawḥīd wa-l-ṣifāt*), whether admixed with inquiries into subtle matters of philosophy (*daqā'iq al-kalām*) or not, is often envisioned as a science employed to produce belief within a hypothetical or actual interlocutor from another faith community, or to produce correct belief in certain tenets within an interlocutor from another Muslim sect. It is also taught as a means of buttressing

faith, especially in Sanūsian or modified Sanūsian contexts such as the later Azharī tradition. There, *kalām* is envisioned as a science that teaches believers how to reason properly regarding their faith, thereby meeting the obligation to reflect (*wujūb al-naẓar*), ensuring their admittance into the community of reasoned evidentialists. It teaches believers how to express their faith in the core points of creed in rationally defensible forms – that is, accompanied by general proofs, the detailed proofs being relegated to specialists.

The distinction between general proofs and detailed proofs is an important point to emphasise in pushing back against caricatures of *kalām* as promoting radical deconstruction and reconstruction of faith as the only way to leave uncritical adherence. However, an analysis of three of the great later verifiers of the Ash‘arī tradition – al-Ījī, al-Taftāzānī and al-Jurjānī – indicates that the Sanūsian and modified Sanūsian model is not universal, and there exists another means to absolve all those believers who cannot state their faith in proper syllogistic form.

The works of al-Sanūsī (or works derived from them), along with al-Taftāzānī’s commentary on the *al-‘Aqā’id al-Nasafiyya* (and his *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid*), represent the two most popular streams of mid-level Sunnī theological works studied in traditional Ash‘arī and Māturīdī curricula.¹⁹ Both texts treat the subject of the validity of the faith of the uncritical adherent, a topic which received a great deal of attention in generations prior.²⁰

As previously mentioned, al-Sanūsī’s more extreme characterisation of the uncritical adherent being charged with disbelief was softened by those who came after him, whose modified Sanūsian position held that the uncritical adherent was sinful and his faith was not safe from wavering. The solution in both cases is to learn the general proofs outlined in al-Sanūsī’s *Umm al-barāhīn* and to leave the detailed proofs to the specialists. We know God exists because the universe exists and has a beginning. If the universe did not have a beginning, either it existed infinitely in the past, it popped into existence without a cause, or it is the result of cyclical causality. Such things are absurd; therefore, it had a beginning, and there must have been something that created it in order to escape said absurdities, which is the beginninglessly eternal Creator. Thereafter, the attributes of the Creator are laid out rationally. All believers must learn these attributes and their general proofs according to al-Sanūsī and those who followed the modified Sanūsian model.

However, al-Taftāzānī, along with al-Ījī and his commentator al-Jurjānī, offer an alternative model of achieving sound faith *via* rational reflection and escaping the problematic state of uncritical adherence in matters of

¹⁹ Al-Ījī’s *Al-Mawāqif* and its commentaries would be higher-level texts.

²⁰ See Spevack, ‘Continuing Conversations’.

faith, namely *via* the proof of the veracity of the prophets (which, as mentioned previously, is a rational proof) that is transmitted *via* mass transmission to later generations. It is the combination of the two types of truthful reports (*khavar al-ṣādiq*) mentioned in al-Nasafi's popular book of creed upon which al-Taftāzānī famously comments – namely, mass transmission (*tawātur*) and the prophetic report aided by miracles (*khavar al-rasūl al-mu'ayyad bi-l-mu'jiza*). This effectively entails that, whenever someone grows up among Muslims and hears and reads of the life and character of the Prophet and the miracles attributed to him, that process of reflection on what has been transmitted *via* mass transmission of the claim to prophecy as well as the content of revelation is sufficiently rational and reflective to produce the roots of faith and to place one in the category of reflective evidentialists rather than uncritical adherents.

Before turning directly to al-Taftāzānī's opinion, al-Ījī and al-Jurjānī lay important groundwork for our understanding of al-Taftāzānī's path to exemption.

Al-Ījī, al-Jurjānī and al-Taftāzānī on What Removes the Uncritical Adherent from Uncritical Adherence

Al-Ījī states in his *al-Mawāqif*:

Affirmation of prophecy comprises knowledge obtained *via* the demonstrative indication of miracles and it (al-Jurjānī: meaning, said knowledge obtained *via* miracles' demonstrative indication of the truthfulness of the Prophet) comprises the knowledge of that which is obligatory to believe (al-Jurjānī: with regard to the entity of God (Glorified and Exalted is He), His Attributes and Actions.²¹ So, whoever firmly and truly affirms this, then he knows all of these matters) even if it is not possible for him to refine the proofs and explain them (for indeed that is not a condition of knowledge nor of removing one from uncritical adherence).²²

Miracles point to the truthfulness of the messenger, which entails belief in the sender (*mursil*) with power, will, knowledge and life, and belief in the message-receiver (*mursal*) and all with which he is sent. So, by affirming prophecy based on belief in prophetic miracles, such belief will be sufficiently reasoned and reflective, such that whatever one accepts on

21 Affirming prophecy is based on knowledge obtained from indications of miracles. That knowledge includes knowledge necessary to believe with regard to God's entity, attributes and actions.

22 Al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, vol. 8, p. 363. Al-Jurjānī's commentary is in parentheses.

narration from the Prophet will be included under the category of reasoned and reflective evidentialist faith.

It appears that al-Ījī and al-Jurjānī consider the reflection on the claim to prophecy, the prophetic miracles that prove it and the content of revelation to be sufficient to remove one from uncritical adherence and enter one into the community of reflective evidentialists.

Al-Taftāzānī further clarifies this position, stating in his *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid*:

The disagreement (regarding the validity of the faith of the uncritical adherent) is not with regard to those who were raised in the lands of Islam, whether its cities, villages, or deserts, wherein the state of the Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon him) and whatever he came with of miracles is mass transmitted amongst themselves, nor does it regard those who contemplate the creation of the heavens and earth and the alternation of night and day, for indeed all of them are from the folk of reflection and evidentiary proof.²³ Rather (the disagreement) regards one who was raised on a lofty mountain, for example, and did not contemplate the realm (*malakūt*) of the heavens and earth, then someone informs him of that which makes believing (that person) incumbent upon him,²⁴ so he affirms him in that which he informed him merely due to his having informed him without pondering or contemplation.²⁵

Al-Taftāzānī's view further supports al-Ījī's and al-Juwaynī's view that faith rooted in belief in prophecy based on miracles' indication of the truthfulness of a prophetic claim is sufficiently reflective in all tenets.²⁶

23 It may be that al-Taftāzānī is considering both the Ash'arī and Māturīdī views on *wujūb al-ma'rifa*, first indicating the *shar'ī wujūb* then the *'aqlī wujūb* position.

24 Fārūqī, *Hāshiya 'alā al-ilāhiyyāt*, MS Arab SM4156, p. 354.

25 Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, vol. 5, p. 223.

26 The premise under consideration here is the following: 'Miracles are proof that a person who claims prophecy is in fact a prophet'. Whoever holds this premise to be true can then trust in the prophetic claim of one who manifests miracles. One comes to know of prophetic claims and their supporting miracles either directly, as was the experience of Muḥammad's companions, or *via* reported knowledge. The question of mass transmission does not come into consideration for those who come to know through direct witnessing in the time of a prophet. Those who receive it *via* reported knowledge either do so through the channel of mass transmission or not. Al-Taftāzānī's claim is that one who holds this principle that miracles support claims to prophecy and has heard reports of these claims and supporting miracles *via* mass transmission is exempt from the need to further reflect and demonstrate proofs for the core points of creed, as mass transmission of reports of prophetic claims and their supporting miracles is sufficient to meet the obligation to reflect (*wujūb al-naẓar*).

Furthermore, that this knowledge of the Prophet's life and character, his miracles and the content of revelation reaches Muslims in Muslim lands *via* mass transmission and is reflected on throughout their lives entails that their faith was always reflective and evidentiary. For al-Taftāzānī, al-Ījī and al-Jurjānī, this transmission is an organic and lived processes, and it does not require the ability to express formal syllogistic proofs, in contradistinction to how al-Sanūsī appears to have envisioned the process.²⁷ It certainly does not require that one deconstruct their inherited beliefs and reconstruct them syllogistically.

The seventh/thirteenth-century Ḥanafī scholar Najm al-Dīn Mukhtār b. Maḥmūd al-Zāhidī (d. 658/1260) offers insight into how mass transmission can suffice as rational proof of the creed necessary for salvation, so long as it is accompanied by contemplation of the fact that prophetic miracles are God's affirmation of a person's claim to prophecy. He says in his *al-Risāla al-nāṣiriyya* (completed 658/1260)²⁸ that people are of three types with respect to their knowledge of the reality of the prophecy of the Prophet Muḥammad and the truth of his claim to prophecy. He outlines them as follows:

1. Those who knew him by his attributes and names by way of the reports of their prophets and their books, and they are 'The People of the Book'. Indeed, they found it written in their Torah and Gospel. God Most High says, 'They know them like they know their sons' such that the most knowledgeable amongst them – 'Abd Allāh b. Salām – said: 'Indeed, I know better the prophecy of Muḥammad than I know my own son because I know it with certainty whereas it is not like that with regard to my son because I do not know if his mother betrayed me or not'.
2. Those who knew him by witnessing first-hand the claim [to prophecy] and the miracles, and they are 'The People of Mecca and Medina and those who visited them'.
3. Those who knew his claim and his miracles by means of mass transmission (*tawātur*), and they are those who are beyond them [1 and 2 above] from the people of the world until the end of time.

Hence, two matters are obligatory upon us with regard to knowing the prophecy of Muḥammad: mass transmission and contemplation (*fīkr*). Mass transmission moreover is needed for knowledge of that which cannot be attained by the intellect, such as knowing the accomplishments of

27 This might be problematised by the fact that he considered the teaching of proofs to students to be like pointing out constellations in the sky.

28 Al-Zāhidī, *Al-Risāla al-nāṣiriyya*, p. 16.

Muḥammad, his claim to being sent as a prophet to humans and jinn (*al-thaqalayn*) until the Day of Judgement, and the manifesting of miraculous breaks in the links of customary causality subsequent to his claim to prophecy. Al-Zāhidī continues:

The matter of contemplation is this: is it possible for miracles to manifest at the hands of a slanderous liar [who slanders and lies] against God? Every rational person knows that false testimony is vile, and causing people to be ignorant and misguiding them through [false] testimony is even more vile. God is transcendentally innocent of evil, so this entails that he [the Prophet] is truthful in his claim. Contemplation is shared by all three aforementioned groups; however, mass transmission is specific to us and whoever from his nation who did not witness him first hand.²⁹

Al-Zāhidī's addition of contemplation (*fikr*) to the obligations of those who are reached by evidence of a claim to prophecy – whether *via* past revelation, witnessing first hand, or learning *via* mass transmission – indicates that there is a minimal amount of reflection necessary. For instance, it is obviously rationally absurd for God to affirm liars with miracles; hence, prophets are truthful in their claims to prophecy. With that, it would appear that al-Taftāzānī and al-Ījī assume that this second condition of contemplation occurs as a norm, exceptions being anomalous, as discussed below.

Who Is the At-risk Population Regarding Uncritical Adherence?

If those who grew up among Muslims in Muslim majority lands were sufficiently informed and reflective, then with whom were the theologians concerned when they discussed the problem of the necessity to base faith in reasoned evidentiary reflection (*wujūb al-naẓar*)? We can deduce from the amalgam of al-Taftāzānī's, al-Ījī's and al-Jurjānī's opinions that the at-risk population in question who runs the risk of falling into the lamentable category of uncritical adherence in faith have the following characteristics:

1. They were not raised around a critical mass of Muslims and knowledge of Islam. In other words, they lack an essential condition of moral accountability (*taklīf*) – namely, being reached by the message of the prophet of their time (*bulūgh al-da'wa*). Al-Taftāzānī gives the classic example of someone raised on a far-off mountainside.

29 Al-Zāhidī, *Al-Risāla al-nāṣiriyya*, pp. 30–31.

2. They do not contemplate the workings of the universe. If they had, that would lead to rational deduction of the existence of the Creator, even if such a person would not be accountable until being reached by the mass transmission of the message of the messenger of their time. Al-Taftāzānī says, '[...] and did not contemplate the realm of the heavens and earth [...]'. If we assume al-Taftāzānī holds the Ash'arī opinion that there is no obligation on one who has not been reached by the message, while such contemplation could produce the root of faith, it will not produce accountability until being reached by the message (*bulūgh al-da'wa*). Such a person would not be obligated to know God, and upon reasoning to knowledge of God's existence, he would not be sinful for failing to meet the obligation of rational reflection on core points of creed (*wujūb al-naẓar*).

If we assume instead that al-Taftāzānī adopted the Māturīdī opinion on *wujūb al-ma'rifa* – namely, that all rational people are accountable for reasoning to the existence of the Creator regardless of having been reached by a prophet – then his statement about contemplation would seem to entail that, if one reflected and reasoned to faith, they would have obtained the root of faith, left uncritical adherence in matters related to Allah's existence, power, will, knowledge, life and oneness,³⁰ and been reached by the metaphorical messenger of the intellect, which reasons to the existence of the Creator through reflection on the creation. However, I think it more likely that he is adopting the Ash'arī position, as the person living on the far-off mountainside would be accountable by mere possession of a sound intellect according to the Māturīdī perspective. In passages previous to the one under discussion, al-Taftāzānī singles out al-Ash'arī by name as one who is said to deny the validity of the belief of the uncritical adherent, although he eventually shows that al-Ash'arī was talking about the perfection of faith (*kamāl al-īmān*) and therefore held the same view as the verifying scholars.³¹

3. They are, at some point, reached by that which makes them morally accountable (*mukallaḥ*). I deduce this from al-Taftāzānī's statement: '[...] then someone informs him of that which makes incumbent upon him believing [that person ...]'.³² This statement is ambiguous and requires further research to determine al-Taftāzānī's intent.

30 There is disagreement as to whether belief in God's oneness is an obligation on one who has not been reached by the message. Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, vol. 5, p. 220.

31 Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, vol. 5, pp. 218–20.

32 Another reading of this might be: 'He is informed of that which he must believe'.

Assuming that singularly narrated reports are not sufficient to produce certainty³³ and therefore not sufficient to enter one into the category of moral accountability (*taklīf*), for the sake of consistency, we might assume that ‘that which makes incumbent upon him’ is being reached by a critical mass of tenets from the message of the messenger of one’s time *via* mass transmission.³⁴ However, al-Taftāzānī uses the singular term ‘*insān*’ – translated above as ‘someone’ – and the singular masculine pronoun translated above as ‘[that person]’. Thus, from this passage, it appears that the person atop a lofty mountain has been informed by at least one person about core salvific points of creed after not previously being in a mass transmission environment, nor having contemplated the wonders of the universe.

4. Such people then accept the knowledge that has reached them but do so without contemplating the entailments of its content. Since many of the tenets of Islam are not self-evident and immediately perceivable (*ḍarūri*) but are rather known *via* multi-step reasoned reflection (*naẓar*), to affirm these tenets without said reflection is problematic. It is hard to imagine this scenario, but perhaps for the sake of argument such a person accepts that a man named Muḥammad existed in the seventh century CE, claimed prophecy, produced miracles and transmitted the Qur’an from the Creator of the universe. At no point in this scenario does the person contemplate that miracles are affirmations from the Creator that a prophet is speaking the truth, nor does he reflect on all the verses of the Qur’an that call one to contemplate patterns and structures of the universe around one.

Such a person described above is apparently the person that the earlier theologians had in mind when they discussed the problem of *wujūb al-naẓar* or

33 See al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-‘aqā'id al-Nasafīyya*.

34 I have argued elsewhere that one might be reached by mass transmission of one essential part of the faith but not another – for example, someone who meets thousands of Muslims who pray five times a day but is never informed that eating pork is impermissible. Therefore, one might argue that there is a minimum salvific threshold where a critical mass of tenets must reach one *via* mass transmission before being held morally accountable for rejecting the message. This is different from being accountable and liable for reward for accepting and acting on part of the message without having been reached by the critical mass of the message. For example, one who prays five times a day but does not learn that Hajj is an obligation or that pork is impermissible might earn reward for belief and actions transmitted from a prophet but not earn punishment for failure to believe or practise other tenets which had not yet reached them. See Spevack, ‘Theological Compassion and Moral Accountability’.

the obligation to rationally reflect on tenets received *via* reported³⁵ knowledge. In summary, they have the following four characteristics:

1. They have not been raised in a mass-transmission environment (that is, 'the lands of Islam').
2. They have not contemplated the wonders of the universe and reasoned to its createdness.
3. Then, they meet someone who informs them of the core salvific creed of the prophet of their time.
4. They accept this creed as reported, without contemplation of its content or any of the proofs for its veracity.

Al-Taftāzānī's account effectively reduces the concern to an almost hypothetical or rare scenario that operates in the hazy space between compound ignorance and reasoned belief, between unaccountability and accountability, *ghayr al-taklīf* and *taklīf*. For al-Sanūsī, however, it seems to have been pressing for all believers, even those raised among Muslims from birth. For him, the space between compound ignorance and reasoned belief is much more pronounced; those who occupy that space declare belief in God, the Prophet Muḥammad, necessarily known points of creed and practice, and possibly even theological and legal doctrines beyond the essentials; yet, they are not able to actively prove or defend their faith due to not having reflected on the ordered proofs for each obligatory point of creed. Such a person is not merely at risk of wavering in faith, but furthermore will not be counted among the believers in the afterlife, according to al-Sanūsī.

Al-Sanūsī's reception in the Azharī tradition, such as the work of Muḥammad b. Shāfi'ī al-Faḍālī (d. 1236/1821) and al-Bājūrī, with which I am most familiar, indicates that the harshness of this opinion led to its being met with challenges and revision, such that a modified position, as represented in al-Laḳānī's *Jawharat al-tawḥīd*, became the popularly accepted position of the Azharī tradition by the nineteenth century. However, the urgency and efficacy of teaching creed, even according to this modified position, has been met with varied resistance in some modernist, reformist and fundamentalist circles. With that, al-Taftāzānī's account of the obligation to reflect and the problem of uncritical adherence offers an alternative to the Sanūsian and modified Sanūsian models that abound in traditionally Ash'arī lands.

35 As mentioned previously, this reported knowledge is a hybrid of knowledge reported from a prophet aided by miracles – *via* mass transmission for those who did not meet the prophet of their time – that is rooted in purely rational proofs.

Conclusion

The Ash'arī school of theology is often presented as claiming that one must know God's thirteen necessary attributes, thirteen impossible attributes and one possible attribute. The obligation to know God (*wujūb al-ma'rifa*) is understood to be to know at least these twenty-seven articles of faith. In addition to the obligation to know God, the obligation to rationally reflect on these points of creed (*wujūb al-naẓar*) – that is, to rationally reflect on the obligatory knowledge of God – is often framed as being able to express general proofs for each of these twenty-seven points of faith, such as 'God exists because the universe could not exist without His having created and sustained it'.

A further discussion emerges as to whether one who believes based on following the views of another (*taqlīd*) and fails to reflect and produce evidence for his belief in God is sinful or not, and if sinful, does this sinfulness entail disbelief or not. The Sanūsian view is that such a person is not merely sinful but a disbeliever who is expected to fare poorly when questioned in the grave. The modified Sanūsian view is that such a person may or may not be sinful, but nonetheless it is feared that their faith may waver in the face of challenges and doubts. To exit from this sinful or concerning state of uncritical adherence, both the Sanūsian and the modified Sanūsian views appear to argue that one must reflect on and produce general proofs for each of the twenty-seven articles of faith mentioned previously.

When the tenets of Islam are organised according to the epistemological channels that validly produce certain knowledge and belief in one who did not previously believe, we saw that three categories of tenets emerged:

- Tenets rooted in rationality (*'aqlī*): those whose truth is known only *via* the unaided intellect.
- Tenets rooted in reported and revealed knowledge (*naqlī*, though ultimately dependent on the *'aqlī*): those whose truth is known only *via* revelation, albeit after revelation has been affirmed *via* the unaided intellect.
- Tenets rooted in either rational or revealed knowledge (*'aqlī* or *naqlī*): those whose truth may be known either *via* the unaided intellect or *via* revelation whose revelatory status was determined *via* the unaided intellect.

When we revisited the tenets in each of these categories and then asked how they can be known with reflective evidentialist certainty rather than *via* uncritical adherence, we saw that some scholars have argued that receipt of mass-transmitted accounts of the claim to prophecy accompanied by the occurrence of miracles along with reflection on such accounts leads

to reasoned evidentialist belief in the existence of the message-sending Creator (*al-Mursil*) and the message-receiving prophet (*al-mursal*).

Three great verifying scholars (*muḥaqqiqūn*) of the late Ash'arī tradition – al-Taftāzānī, al-Ījī and al-Jurjānī – can collectively be seen as arguing that the only tenets of faith that must be obtained from purely rational proofs are the belief in Allah's necessary existence, power, will, knowledge and life, as obtained from belief in the Prophet Muḥammad's mass-transmitted claim to prophecy that was supported and affirmed by miraculous breaks in causality, brought about by the one who sent the messenger. With that knowledge obtained *via* rational reflection, all other content of the message may be validly accepted *via* narration and without additional reflection based on trust in the veracity of the prophetic reporter. As such, acceptance of these latter points of creed would not entail uncritical adherence in its pejorative and impermissible sense. Furthermore, one need not be able to express these as proofs, because expressing proofs is not a condition of reflective knowledge.

With that, the obligation to reflect is reduced to reasoned evidentialist belief in God possessing the five attributes that produce the root of faith and belief in the messenger who was aided by miracles that could not come about without the power, will and knowledge of an existent and living creator; all other points of faith could be obtained by reliance on revealed knowledge whose distant premises are rooted in rational knowledge (*al-naqlī al-mustanid bi-l-'aqlī*), including the remainder of the twenty-seven points of creed mentioned by al-Sanūsī. Furthermore, al-Taftāzānī emphasised that the mass transmission of knowledge of the Prophet Muḥammad's claims and manifestation of miracles is sufficient to cause those who receive this knowledge to reflect on it and to be among the community of reflective evidentialists. Most importantly, he also reduced the question of the faith of the uncritical adherent to a person who is raised outside of a mass transmission environment and who never contemplated the wonders of the universe, and thereby al-Taftāzānī seems to declare all other believers to be in compliance with the obligation to reflect on the core creed.

With that, the notion that Ash'arīs must deconstruct and reconstruct their faith in God step-by-step through clearly expressed yet general proofs is problematised, as several great scholars of their school, along with Māturīdīs, such as al-Zāhidī, have absolved the vast majority of Muslims in mass transmission environments – conceived in their time as Muslim majority lands – of reflective evidentialism in the form of ordered premises and conclusions. Instead, they declare that such people have met the obligation of reflective evidentialism by receiving and reflecting on the mass-transmitted knowledge of the Prophet's state, miracles and teachings (including the Qur'an).

What then of all the efforts of theologians such as al-Taftāzānī, al-Ījī, al-Jurjānī and other scholars of the Ash'arī and Māturīdī schools who constructed detailed proofs for the tenets of faith? These remain the communal obligation of scholars, one of whom must exist in each region, in order to serve as an expert guide for anyone seeking proofs or answers to doubts.³⁶

Beyond the discussion of whether reflective evidentialism – in any form discussed above – is necessary for one to meet the obligation of having proper knowledge of God, scholars such as Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī (d. 918/1512) acknowledge that someone whose deep faith in God (and presumably in the mass transmission of prophetic knowledge) is grounded in their innate disposition (*fiṭra*) might not need to turn to reflective evidentialism in all matters of core creed, including those included in that by which the root of faith is obtained. Nonetheless, although such a person may exist and be absolved of reflective evidentialism in at least some tenets related to the attributes of God, the communal obligation to have expert scholars who have mastery of theological arguments and proofs remains.³⁷ Al-Dawānī says in his commentary on *al-'Aqā'id al-aḍudiyya*:

If you were to say: Some of the imams, such as Imam al-Ghazālī and Imam al-Rāzī, express in their books the position that the existence of the Necessarily Existent (God) is known axiomatically without reflection (*badihī*), so there is no need for reflection. I say: The claim that [knowledge of the existence of God] is axiomatic with regard to all individuals is rejected. Even if it we submit to it [for the sake of argument], reflection in the rest of His attributes – such as knowledge, power, will, and others – would be obligatory, as they are not axiomatic. Perhaps the truth is that reflection is obligatory for all accountable people in that which is not axiomatic with regard to them, so whoever is free of need for reflection in some of God's attributes, reflection upon them is not mandatory.³⁸

Contemporary appeals to innate disposition, rooted in interpretations of Ibn Taymiyya's views, while finding some support in the Ash'arī-Māturīdī tradition, are reasonably limited by al-Dawānī's retort that such appeals to innate disposition are not universally applicable and only valid in some specific individuals regarding specific tenets. This point is not, however, a refutation or critique of reflective theological evidentialism as found in the books of Sunnī *kalām*, merely an acknowledgement that general and specific proofs are not necessary for all individuals to know or explicitly

36 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, p. 33.

37 Al-Ghursī, *Al-Musāyara*, p. 70.

38 Al-Ghursī, *Al-Musāyara*, p. 70.

express. That the obligation to reflect can be met through reception of and reflection on mass-transmitted prophetic knowledge, or after reception possibly dispensed with due to innate disposition, does not in any way negate the value or communal obligation of Islamic theology based on reflective evidentialism. Al-Dawānī continues:

It is true that detailed proofs are a communal obligation such that by means of them one is able to remove doubts, force the obstinate to concede, and guide those seeking guidance; the jurists have said it is necessary that in every single region (*masāfat al-qaṣr*)³⁹ there is someone with this characteristic [that is, who knows the detailed proofs], just as it is forbidden for a daytrip's distance (*masāfat al-'adwā*)⁴⁰ to be absent of a scholar of the external matters of sacred law which the general masses need.

This rendition of and variation on the classic theme of the obligation to reflect (*wujūb al-naẓar*) indicates that the more popularly known Sanūsian and modified-Sanūsian models are not solely representative of the Ash'arī school. Rather, three of the top verifiers of the Ash'arī school – al-Ījī, al-Jurjānī and al-Taftāzānī – adopted a very different interpretation of the early discussions around the obligation to reflect on creed received *via* reported knowledge. These scholars offer a middle road between wholesale rejection of rational theology and making *kalām* proofs personally obligatory on all, especially caricatures that represent the Ash'arī school as obligating each individual to rationally deconstruct and reconstruct their faith through rational investigation and proof. The views explored in this chapter thus challenge our reading of Ash'arī intellectual history as well as the scope of the school's application.

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39 The distance at which one would shorten their prayers, approximately forty-eight miles, or the journey of three days and nights.
 40 This is defined as a region whose distance can be traversed by one setting out after noon and returning at night. Al-Ghursī, *Al-Musāyara*, p. 70.

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PART III

Comparative Studies in Islamic and Christian Epistemology

CHAPTER 7

The Epistemological Status of Causation within al-Ghazālī's Cosmological Argument in Light of Reid's Modest Foundationalism

Ayşenur Ünügür-Tabur

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine whether Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) epistemology can accommodate his cosmological argument without begging the question by exploring the underlying epistemology through Thomas Reid's (d. 1796) modest foundationalism. Cosmological arguments claim to prove God's existence as the uncaused cause of the existence of the universe, based on the principle that everything except God requires a cause or sufficient reason for its existence. Similarly, the first premise of al-Ghazālī's cosmological argument is that whatever begins to exist must have a cause – namely, 'there must be a cause (*sabab*) for the origination (*ḥudūth*) of anything originated (*ḥādith*)'.¹ This premise concerns the notion of causation in al-Ghazālī's system. In his works, he appears to uphold two metaphysical aspects of causation. According to the first one, the causation that we observe in nature is ultimately the constant conjunction of events, which contrasts with the view of Islamic philosophers that there is a necessary causal relation between causes and effects. The second aspect, which completes the first one, is God's agency in terms of Him being the only cause that necessitates its effect.

I will investigate whether the first premise of al-Ghazālī's cosmological argument is derived based on any of these metaphysical assumptions and argue that, rather than the first premise of his cosmological argument being grounded in these metaphysical principles, they are epistemically grounded in the first premise, which is a self-evident, necessary first principle of the human mind. Hence, I read this premise of the cosmological argument as an aspect of al-Ghazālī's epistemology. I will first argue that

1 Tibawi, 'Al-Ghazālī's Tract on Dogmatic Theology', p. 98.

the constant conjunction of events is neither strong enough to be conclusive and to epistemically ground the core presumption of his cosmological argument, nor does al-Ghazālī consider it to be so. In doing this, I will explain how his account of causation differs from that of David Hume (d. 1776), in that he does not take our experience of the constant conjunction of events as the source of our notion of causation. Secondly, I will compare al-Ghazālī's epistemological account to that of René Descartes to show that al-Ghazālī does not appeal to the metaphysical principle of God being the only necessary efficient cause to ground his cosmological argument, either. Thirdly, I will argue that al-Ghazālī presumes the first premise of the cosmological argument to be a necessary first principle, a primary notion of causation that epistemically grounds both metaphysical aspects of causation in question. In analysing all three points, I will benefit from Thomas Reid's modest foundationalism. Reid's modest foundationalism differs from classical foundationalism in terms of incorporating various fallible and infallible beliefs as basic beliefs that are not derived either from reasoning or from experience.² Reid also argues that the first premise of the cosmological argument 'whatever begins to exist must have a cause' is among the necessary basic beliefs and grounds our notion of causation.

Al-Ghazālī and David Hume on the Constant Conjunction of Events

The first metaphysical aspect of al-Ghazālī's account of causation is the constant conjunction of events. Al-Ghazālī denies the existence of any genuine causal connection between two observed events in the seventeenth chapter of his work *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-falāsifa*).³ He argues that, for an event to be a genuine cause of another event, there must be a necessary connection between the two events whereby the existence of

2 Reid has criticised classical Cartesian foundationalism for its ambition to build human knowledge by reasoning from the one foundational and infallible belief that 'I think, therefore I am'. For Reid, foundational beliefs are many in number, some fallible and others infallible. Not only do the number of basic beliefs make Reid's foundationalism modest, but also his claim that none of these beliefs can be derived by reasoning or through experience (particularly, see Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*). In this chapter, I appeal to Reid's modest foundationalism in two respects: his critique of both the rationalist and empiricist methodologies in deriving foundational beliefs and his characterisation of the first premise of the cosmological argument as a necessary first principle.

3 I follow Michael Marmura in holding that al-Ghazālī's subsequent proposal in this chapter of a second causal theory that guarantees the genuine causal efficacy of things is adopted for the sake of argument and does not reflect his own position. See al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, pp. xxiv–xxv.

the cause necessitates the existence of the effect. However, the mere constant conjunction of events fails to meet this criterion:

The connection between what is habitually believed to be a cause and what is habitually believed to be an effect is not necessary, according to us. But [with] any two things, where 'this' is not 'that' and 'that' is not 'this' and where neither the affirmation of the one entails the affirmation of the other nor the negation of the one entails negation of the other, it is not a necessity of the existence of the one that the other should exist, and it is not a necessity of the nonexistence of the one that the other should not exist.⁴

His arguments mainly draw on his modal analysis of the relation between a cause and an effect. For him, the conceivability of the disjunction between two events entails the possibility of their occurring independently of each other and diminishes the genuine causal connection between them. For instance, since we constantly observe the conjunction between throwing cotton into fire and the cotton's burning, we conclude that fire is the cause of burning. However, we can conceive both of cotton's not-burning after touching the fire and of its burning without touching the fire.

Al-Ghazālī's principal target in his denial of the genuine causal connection between two events is the *falāsifa*'s theory that 'the possibility of existence is a relative characterization (*waṣf idāfi*) that is not self-subsistent', which 'need[s] a receptacle to relate to, and there is no receptacle except matter'.⁵ Matter being the receptacle of possibilities is associated with matter's intrinsic potentialities and corresponds to ontological possibilities inherent to it. Accordingly, the conceptual possibility follows the ontological possibility. For instance, the conceptual possibility of cotton's burning depends on the ontological possibility of the existence of some specific matter with the potentialities that are receptive of burning. The *falāsifa*'s account involves two corollaries that al-Ghazālī disregards as incompatible with Islamic teaching: the eternality of matter as the receptacle of possibility and causal efficacy or power attributed to matter. Al-Ghazālī's reduction of the causal connection in nature to a mere conjunction of events relates mainly to the second corollary, which entails a necessary occurrence of the effect 'on the supposition of contact of a naturally active force with a naturally passive force'.⁶ In other words, al-Ghazālī contests the agency attributed to matter.

4 Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, p. 166.

5 Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, p. 41.

6 See Avicenna's discussion in *Al-Najāt*, Book I, Chapter 1. This passage is cited from Dutton, 'Al-Ghazālī on Possibility and the Critique of Causality', p. 31.

Another reason for al-Ghazālī's rejection of any genuine causal connection between two observed events is as follows. If the source of the causal connection is the potentialities in matter in the sense that these are powers that cause motion necessarily in the absence of any impediment, then God's providence in the course of nature becomes impossible. Blake D. Dutton has summarised the rationale behind al-Ghazālī's view as follows:

Ghazālī's argument for this thesis is simple: it is impossible for two powers to be related as cause to a single object of power. This is because if there were two such powers, they would have to be either equal or unequal. However, since causal powers can be neither equal nor unequal with respect to a single object of power, there cannot be two such causal powers.⁷

Dutton has explained his statement with an example of human agency since for al-Ghazālī human beings are not the efficient causes of their action either. However, I will apply his statement to inanimate beings. Consider that fire has the active power to burn, and cotton has the passive power to be burned. It is due to these powers that, whenever they contact each other, the cotton burns. If this causal connection is a necessary one, then the cotton's not-burning can never be the case after touching the fire under the proper conditions. Consider also that God is omnipotent and capable of making it the case that the cotton does not burn after touching the fire. But God cannot stop the fire from burning the cotton if the causal connection between them is a necessary one. However, if God can create the cotton as unburnt despite fire touching the cotton, then their causal connection is not necessary. Thus, for al-Ghazālī, a necessity of causal connection between events would rule out God's omnipotence over possible events. Given the conceivability of God creating two events occurring independently of each other, al-Ghazālī rejects the necessary connection between them.

For al-Ghazālī, even though our scientific or empirical knowledge partially relies on our observation of the constant conjunction of events and is thus contingent, this empirical knowledge is not the ultimate source of our notion of causation. On the contrary, we must have epistemic access to a primary notion of causation that enables us to associate two events that occur in constant conjunction as having a causal relationship. Let me elaborate on this point with an analysis of Hume's understanding of causation as the constant conjunction of events and show how al-Ghazālī's account differs from Hume's account in epistemic terms.

Similar to al-Ghazālī, Hume regards the causal connection between two events as their contingent occurrence in constant conjunction. His

7 Dutton, 'Al-Ghazālī on Possibility and the Critique of Causality', p. 36.

rejection of the necessity of causal connection in nature draws also on the possibility of conceiving the disjunction between the observed cause and effect. As an empiricist philosopher, Hume seeks to explain the source of our notion of causality in experience. Thus, he reduces the question of 'how does experience give rise to such a principle [the causal principle]?' to the question of 'why [do] we conclude, that such particular causes must necessarily have such particular effects, and why [do] we form an inference from one to another?'⁸ According to his theory of ideas, all human knowledge ultimately originates in the perception of impressions and ideas that are imprinted in our minds by these impressions. For him, our observation of the constant conjunction of events produces a 'propensity' in us for expecting similar effects in the presence of similar causes, and he identifies this propensity with 'custom or habit'.⁹

Based on this weak sense of causation between two events, Hume brings into question the soundness of the cosmological argument. According to him, our observation of the constant conjunction of two events makes us form a belief that they are causally related with each other. Hence, the cosmological argument involves two major problems. First, we cannot justify the general principle that 'whatever comes to exist must have a cause' by sheer observation, but we can only expect that similar effects follow from similar causes. Secondly, we cannot even apply the similar causes-similar effects principle to the occurrence of the universe because it is a one-time phenomenon that we cannot constantly observe.¹⁰ It seems that Hume does not refer to the constant conjunction of events mainly as a metaphysical principle but takes it to be the very ground of our notion of causation. So, if al-Ghazālī assumes that our notion of causation is epistemically grounded in the metaphysical principle of the constant conjunction of events, then his cosmological argument becomes susceptible to the problems raised by Hume.

However, al-Ghazālī does not consider the constant conjunction of events to be the source of our concept of causation since he argues that we cannot observe causation itself in nature:

Observation, however, [only] shows the occurrence [of burning] at [the time of the contact with the fire] but does not show the occurrence [of burning] by [the fire] and [the fact] that there is no other

8 Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, vol. 1, p. 58.

9 Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 121.

10 For a more detailed analysis and critique of Hume's experience-based notion of causation and its relevance to the design argument, see Tabur, 'Contesting Hume's Theory of Causation and his Critique of the Design Argument'.

cause for it [. . .] It has thus become clear that [something's] existence with a thing does not prove that it exists by [that thing].¹¹

Let me explore al-Ghazālī's approach in light of Reid's objection to Hume's rendering of habit as the source of our notion of causation. Similar to al-Ghazālī, Reid claims that 'causation is not an object of sense' and 'experience may shew us what is the established course of nature, but can never shew what connection of things are in their nature necessary'.¹² Thus, for him, experience cannot be the source of our notion of causation, but rather we need a primary notion of causation as a first principle produced by our natural constitution to discern the connection between the events that we observe. He has also emphasised that the connection between causes and effects is a constant conjunction that nature established between certain events, and we can only judge this conjunction to be a causal connection through 'a disposition to observe [to notice] those connections to confide in their continuance, and to make use of them for the improvement of our knowledge'.¹³ For instance, seeing a rose in front of us and experiencing a smell are two different things. Regardless of how often we have a rose nearby in conjunction with a smell, there is no basis to establish a causal connection between these two different sensations since what we can observe is only the cause and effect, not the causation itself. Therefore, we cannot conclude that the rose is the cause of the smell only because they always appear together, but we need a basic disposition, a primary notion of causation that enables us to establish a causal connection between events in the first place.¹⁴ Therefore, for both al-Ghazālī and Reid, our notion of causation is prior to our experience of the constant conjunction of events and, thus, we do not derive it from experience. Rather, our capacity to infer a causal connection between two events that occur in constant conjunction is epistemically grounded in this primary notion of causation.

11 Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, p. 167.

12 Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, pp. 498–99.

13 Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind*, vol. 3, p. 59.

14 There seems to be a distinction between the views of Reid and al-Ghazālī on one's belief about the continuity of the observed conjunction of events or, more precisely, on induction. For Reid, induction is also a constitutional principle of the human mind. We can observe events and establish causal connections between them through a basic disposition of our minds and form the general belief that similar causes produce similar effects based on another mental disposition. However, for al-Ghazālī, our general belief that similar causes produce similar effects is created by God in our minds. He refers to this issue mainly in association with miracles and argues that we do not expect a break in the course of nature despite its conceivability because of God's creation of the respective belief in our minds. Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, p. 171.

It has become clear that the primary notion of causation is not derived from experience for al-Ghazālī. Now, we might investigate whether it is derived either by reasoning or by the metaphysical aspect of causation – that is, God being the only efficient and necessary cause of events. To understand the role of reason and God in al-Ghazālī's epistemology, in the following section his sceptical period along with his resolution of it will be analysed in comparison with Descartes' methodic scepticism.

God's Epistemic Relevance in al-Ghazālī's and Descartes' Resolution of Scepticism

During his sceptical period, al-Ghazālī says that he sought the true meaning of knowledge as well as the 'the original *fiṭra*' (natural disposition) after having realised that most of the beliefs that people possess are a result of imitation of what they were taught by their teachers and parents.¹⁵ Thus, his first step in the search of the true meaning of knowledge was to 'sift out these uncritical beliefs'. He mentions three initial criteria to determine whether a belief corresponds to certain knowledge – namely, that 'the thing known is made so manifest that no doubt clings to it, nor is it accompanied by the possibility of error and deception, nor can the mind even suppose such a possibility'. As he states, the only beliefs that fulfil these criteria are sense data and self-evident truths. However, a further examination of these two categories of beliefs made al-Ghazālī realise that sense data might not be as reliable as it appears to be, because his rational judgement makes it clear that his perceptual judgement does not always corresponds to reality, such as in the case of his mere perceptual judgement of the stars' size being falsified by geometrical proofs. He then thought of considering reason-based knowledge such as 'ten is more than three', or 'one and the same thing cannot be simultaneously affirmed and denied', as the only reliable knowledge. However, he also dismisses this option by his dream argument. According to this argument, whenever one is in a dream, she conceives of certain things as real without any doubt, and only after waking up she recognises how 'groundless and unsubstantial' those beliefs were. Similarly, there might be a higher reality that we shall wake up to after death in which our rational beliefs may be rendered as unsubstantial fancies by a judge higher than reason.¹⁶

Al-Ghazālī's way to resolve his scepticism establishes the basis of his epistemic foundationalism. But before examining how his doubts were resolved and the role of God and reason in this process, let me examine

15 McCarthy (trans.), *Freedom and Fulfillment*, p. 63.

16 McCarthy (trans.), *Freedom and Fulfillment*, pp. 64–65.

Descartes' methodological scepticism which follows a line of reasoning quite similar to al-Ghazālī's scepticism, yet attempts a different resolution. I will then introduce Reid's critique of Descartes' so-called resolution in order to clarify the distinction between God's explanatory and justificatory role in one's epistemology.

In his work *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes, like al-Ghazālī, brings into question the reliability of the beliefs that he had unquestionably accepted until that time. He does this by following a strategy similar to that of al-Ghazālī, which is directly attacking the first principles that ground every belief – that is, self-perception and reasoning – until reaching 'entirely certain and indubitable' beliefs rather than examining each belief one by one.¹⁷ He appeals to a few arguments, including the dream argument to show the possibility that he might be deceived in his beliefs. But the strongest argument he offers is the evil demon argument that presumes the existence of an evil demon which deceives him in all of his beliefs, including sense-perception as well as self-evident truths such as 'two and three together always form five, and the square can never have more than four sides'.¹⁸ As he proceeds, he claims to have realised an attribute – namely, that 'I am, I exist' – that cannot be separated from him insofar as he performs the thinking activity. Even though he admits the possibility of being deceived about his beliefs concerning sense perception or self-evident truths, he cannot be deceived so as to bring the belief 'I exist' into question since, insofar as he is deceived, he engages in a thinking activity. And so long as he thinks, he exists. This state of mind is famously expressed by Descartes as 'I think, therefore I am', and we can replace it with 'I doubt, therefore I am', or 'I am deceived, therefore I am'.¹⁹

After allegedly having proven his own existence, Descartes attempts to prove the existence of the ideas that exist in his mind. His argument for this is simple: there must be objects of thinking insofar as one thinks, which are ideas. By showing the existence of ideas in his mind, he does not mean to prove their correspondence with reality. So, it might be possible that he is still deceived by the evil demon about the external reality of his ideas. Therefore, his next aim is to prove the reliability of his sense perception by establishing the connection between his mind and the external world. To do this, he appeals to the idea of God. He distinguishes ideas into three categories according to their origins: innate ideas that are imprinted in our minds from birth, perceptual ideas that are caused by external objects, and the ideas that are invented by our minds. He also employs a traditional principle of causation that asserts that 'the total cause of something must

17 Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 46.

18 Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, pp. 48–49.

19 Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, pp. 52–53.

contain as much reality as does the effect', which in turn implies that what is more perfect – namely, what contains more reality – cannot arise from what is less perfect.²⁰ He uses this principle to show that the idea of God can neither originate in our perception nor be an invention of our minds, given that the representative realities incorporated in the idea of God (such as infinity, eternity, unchangeability, independency, supreme intelligence and power) are not included in our finite reality. Therefore, this idea should be imprinted on our minds by a being who possesses these perfections – that is, God must exist in reality as the source of this idea.²¹ He uses his proof for God's existence to eliminate the argument of the evil demon; he labels God as the warrant for the reliability of our beliefs deriving from sense perception, owing to his principle that, being perfectly good, God cannot be a deceiver. In other words, one cannot justifiably argue for the reality of the external world, nor for her belief concerning it without presuming God's existence in Descartes' epistemology.

Two important characteristics are to be discerned from Descartes' resolution of the sceptical challenge. First, he appeals to reasoning in his search for a sound foundation of knowledge without actually bringing the reliability of his reasoning faculty into question, and second, he involves God as a justificatory element in his epistemological system. Both features have been criticised and deemed question-begging by Reid. The nature of Reid's objection is that identifying reason as the uniquely reliable source of all other knowledge and to establish arguments, such as for God's existence, on it to eliminate scepticism is not justifiable. Either our cognitive faculties are reliable altogether, or we encounter absolute scepticism:

It is strange that so acute a reasoner [Descartes] didn't perceive, that in this reasoning there is evidently a begging of the question. For if our faculties be fallacious; why may they not deceive us in this reasoning as well as in others? And if they are to be trusted in this instance, without a voucher, why not in others?²²

As Patrick Rysiew has pointed out in his article 'Reid and Epistemic Naturalism', the main mistake made by philosophers like Descartes is to think that the regulative and constitutive rules of mind can be separated from each other. In other words, it is a mistake to suppose that one's mind can operate to resolve the sceptical challenge in terms of beliefs produced by mental faculties, without questioning the reliability of mental faculties themselves and even of the beliefs produced by them in the first place.

20 Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 63.

21 Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, pp. 69–70.

22 Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, p. 481.

As Reid puts it, 'No man ever thinks of this principle, unless when he considers the grounds of scepticism; yet it invariably governs his opinions'.²³ Thus, one cannot be said to have proven the first principles without already presuming them, and such kinds of arguments beg the question. As Rysiew has rightly pointed out in the following excerpt, Reid's objection accommodates our intuitions:

Hence our tendency to say, with Reid, that one who professes not to believe the first principles, but who acts as though he does believe them, 'either acts the hypocrite, or imposes upon himself'.²⁴

According to Reid's modest foundationalism, the first principles of our beliefs are neither derived from reasoning nor from experience. They are the very foundations of all our beliefs and neither require nor admit of any proof for their reliability, because they are the beliefs upon which all proofs are established.²⁵ There are two aspects to the first principles in Reid's system. They are both constitutive of one's mental system as the belief-producing mechanism and regulative as the governing beliefs in one's reasoning. Hence, as Rysiew has pointed out, 'we can think of common sense as the faculty which gives rise to a set of basic propositions or beliefs'.²⁶

Similar to al-Ghazālī, Reid considers God to be the source and originator of everything and, unlike Descartes, he does not appeal to God's existence as a justificatory element in his modest foundational approach. Instead, his reference to God is only as the explanatory source of origination. More precisely, in opposition to Descartes' view, one does not need to believe in God to have justified true beliefs about reality because true knowledge ultimately has to do with one's epistemic constitution. In order to explain this constitution, he offers the following analogy:

Perhaps evidence, as in many other respects it resembles light, so in this also, that as light, which is to discover of all visible objects, discovers itself at the same time; so evidence, which is the voucher for all truth, vouches for itself at the same time.²⁷

Hence, the source of light can be compared to one's constitution, whereas the light that it reveals can be compared to foundational beliefs. Reid's light analogy brings us back to al-Ghazālī's resolution to scepticism, since he

23 Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, p. 482.

24 Rysiew, 'Reid and Epistemic Naturalism', p. 450.

25 Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, p. 17.

26 Rysiew, 'Reid and Epistemic Naturalism', p. 442.

27 Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, p. 481.

claims to have overcome his doubts by 'the effect of a light which God Most High cast into [his] breast'.²⁸ Similar to Reid, he was aware of the inadmissibility of any kind of proof in removing his doubts, given that 'the only way to put together a proof was to combine primary cognitions', which were the subject of his doubts in the first place.²⁹ Thus, unlike Descartes, he did not appeal to any sort of reasoning to overcome his scepticism. Moreover, similar to Reid, al-Ghazālī viewed the sceptical state of mind as a sickness or lunacy. According to him, the light cast upon his heart made him overcome this sickness by enabling his 'soul to regain its health and equilibrium' and to accept 'the self-evident data of reason and rely on them with safety and certainty'.³⁰ Now, we shall take a closer look at what al-Ghazālī refers to by the light of the heart or the equilibrium of the soul by examining the part of knowledge in one of his latest works, *Revival of the Religious Sciences (Iḥyā' ulūm al-dīn)*.

In the Book of Knowledge within the *Iḥyā'*, al-Ghazālī mentions four different meanings of the term 'intellect' (*'aql*). The first meaning refers to a sort of instinct (*gharīza*) or constitutive principle 'through which the theoretical sciences are grasped and understood', but more importantly to 'a light cast into the heart preparing it thereby to grasp things and understand them'.³¹ For him, everybody is created upon the *fiṭra* – that is, 'born with an inherent knowledge of reality; inherent since it is readily disposed to perceive reality'.³² Hence, it seems that the light cast on al-Ghazālī's heart by God is his re-endorsement of his *fiṭra* as the reliable source of his knowledge. One might claim that al-Ghazālī refers to God as a justificatory element in his epistemology, given that he claims to have reverted to his original *fiṭra* after an illumination from God. However, that would be incorrect.

To illustrate this point, consider the example of a patient with a state of mental dysfunction that causes him to perceive everybody and everything around him as trying to damage him. His doctor offers him medicine to treat this illness. But since his mental dysfunction makes him also think that the doctor intends to harm him, he does not, in his sick state of mind, accept the treatment. Then, the doctor decides to administer the medication to the patient without his consent, knowing well the patient's strong desire to be healed. After receiving the medication, the patient regains his healthy mental state. Upon restoration of his original healthy thinking, the patient comes to judge that it is only by the treatment of

28 McCarthy (trans.), *Freedom and Fulfillment*, p. 66.

29 McCarthy (trans.), *Freedom and Fulfillment*, p. 66.

30 McCarthy (trans.), *Freedom and Fulfillment*, p. 66.

31 Al-Ghazālī, *The Book of Knowledge*, p. 218.

32 Al-Ghazālī, *The Book of Knowledge*, p. 222.

the doctor that he regained his mental health. In this scenario, the patient's return to health again has nothing to do with his belief about the doctor's treatment. In other words, it is not because he believed in the doctor's treatment that he regained his mental health, but it is only posterior to the restoration of his mental health that he could appreciate the role of the doctor in his treatment.

How can we understand this example in relation to al-Ghazālī's epistemology and metaphysics? We can compare the patient's belief in the reliability of the doctor to al-Ghazālī's metaphysical principle of causation concerning God being the only efficient and necessary cause. In the sceptical state of mind, one cannot accept the reliability of any metaphysical principles. Thus, in order to come to judge that God is the only efficient and necessary cause, one needs to have a sound epistemic constitution. As argued in the previous section, establishing a connection between causes and effects is only possible in the presence of a natural disposition, or necessary first principle, in our minds that enables us to notice a connection as causal. Similarly, the metaphysical principle of God's causal role is grounded in this very epistemic disposition. Hence, al-Ghazālī's argument does not become circular because of his commitment to this metaphysical principle. It could beg the question if he considered God's existence and this metaphysical principle as a justificatory element in his epistemology. But, just as the patient's belief in the doctor's trustworthiness does not play any role in his mental cure, God's involvement in al-Ghazālī's resolution of his sceptical state of mind does not establish any justification for the removal of his doubts. This is because he did not regard any of his cognitions as sound or indubitable so as to justify arguments during his sceptical period. Only after getting his equilibrium back was he able to reflect on God's role in his mental healing. Therefore, he can make metaphysical claims concerning God's causal efficacy only after having a sound epistemic constitution, which is independent of his belief in God.

Returning to the *Iḥyā'*, the second meaning of intellect alludes to 'axiomatic (*ḍarūrī*) knowledge such as the possibility of possible things and the impossibility of impossible things', while the third meaning concerns empirical knowledge – the former relating to infallible truths and the latter to the contingencies.³³ The practical intellect is the fourth meaning, and its proper function is 'to subdue the appetite which hankers for immediate pleasure'.³⁴ Notably, al-Ghazālī mentions that the first meaning of the intellect as *fiṭra* is the only disputed one among all four meanings. However, for him, there is no doubt, not only about its existence, but also about it being

33 Al-Ghazālī, *The Book of Knowledge*, p. 219. Note that the transliteration of *ḍarūrī* has been adjusted from the consulted translation.

34 Al-Ghazālī, *The Book of Knowledge*, p. 220.

the origin and foundation of the remaining kinds of intellects; that is, all three intellects are 'inherent in it by nature and come to light when some cause which will bring them out takes place'.³⁵ Like Reid, al-Ghazālī seems to refer to intellect as both a constitutive and regulative principle in his metaphor, which compares the relation between the intellect and its principles to 'the oil in almond nuts and the attar in rose petals'.³⁶ He also endorses a modest foundationalist approach concerning the direct correspondence between one's mind and the external world, as he argues for the inherent disposition to perceive reality. Accordingly, a person cannot doubt truths about the external world without bringing his mental faculties in question. But doubting one's own mental faculties as well as trying to remove this doubt would in turn be a circular attempt, because without appealing to one's original constitution and beliefs, one's mind cannot operate.

Conclusion

It has become clear that al-Ghazālī, like Reid, does not appeal to reason or God for justification within his epistemology. In other words, for al-Ghazālī, one is justified in relying on his sense perception as well as the dictates of reason without having to prove their reliability, either through reasoning or through the existence of God. Neither Reid nor al-Ghazālī fall into the error of confusing 'what originates a belief' with what 'converts it into a justified belief and knowledge'.³⁷ In light of this exploration of al-Ghazālī's epistemology through Reid's modest foundationalism, it can be asserted that his epistemology enables him to consider the first premise of the cosmological argument in the category of the self-evident truths that are available to everyone as justified beliefs, regardless of their belief in God insofar as that person's noetic constitution – namely, their *fiṭra* – functions as it should.³⁸ Hence, his two metaphysical aspects of causation – that is,

35 Al-Ghazālī, *The Book of Knowledge*, p. 221.

36 Al-Ghazālī, *The Book of Knowledge*, p. 220.

37 This is also Keith Lehrer's objection to Alvin Goldman's naturalistic account of justification. See Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge*, pp. 168–69.

38 C. Stephen Evans classifies cosmological arguments into several categories: Part Arguments *versus* Whole Arguments, Causal Arguments *versus* Explanation Arguments, Temporal Arguments *versus* Non-Temporal Arguments, and Deductive Arguments *versus* Inductive Arguments; Evans, *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God*, pp. 50–55. Based on this classification, Al-Ghazālī's argument qualifies as a whole argument because it addresses the creation of the universe as a whole, rather than starting from its individual components. It is also a causal argument, as it explains the existence of the universe in terms of a causal relationship. It is temporal, assuming that the universe has a beginning in time. Most importantly, the deductive nature of Al-Ghazālī's argument reflects a key feature of his moderate foundationalism, as it treats the argument's first premise as a basic belief or necessary truth.

constant conjunction of events and God being the only genuine cause – are epistemically grounded in the necessary first principle that ‘whatever begins to exist must have a cause’, the former being a contingent truth, while the latter is an inferential necessary truth.

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CHAPTER 8

‘Is There Any Doubt about God?’ Maktab-i Tafkīk’s Religious Epistemology in Comparison with Reformed Epistemology

Amir Mohammad Emami

Introduction¹

‘Is there any doubt about God, the originator of the heavens and the earth?’² When the arguments for the existence of God are discussed, the advocates of Maktab-i Tafkīk (the School of Separation) frequently cite this verse against the prevalent philosophical efforts to prove the existence of God. Under the influence of a famous Shī‘ī scholar Mīrzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī (d. 1365/1946), they claim that such arguments are quite worthless in proving the existence of God, as they are based on fallacious philosophical assumptions and misleading epistemological grounds. The idea is at odds with epistemic foundationalism, a concept common in both Islamic and Christian theology and philosophy, according to which arguments are required for almost all religious beliefs. Yet it is comparable to the significant movement of Reformed Epistemology in contemporary philosophy of religion.

The aim of this essay is to explore the religious epistemology of Maktab-i Tafkīk on the existence of God in dialogue with Reformed Epistemology. This study will be useful for contemporary analytic Islamic theology

1 I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who helped me write and publish this chapter. I am grateful to the John Templeton Foundation and Cambridge Muslim College for supporting the project. I would like to thank the team of the Beyond Foundationalism project for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this project and for their support. I am especially grateful to Ramon Harvey and Safaruk Chowdhury for carefully reviewing the first drafts of the chapter and for their insightful comments, which helped me improve the essay significantly. I would also like to thank Joshua Ralston and Ali Taghaviniasab for their helpful suggestions and comments. Last but not least, the text would not be as pleasant as it is without Shahanaz Begum’s generous editorial efforts to improve its fluency.

2 Q. 14:10.

by suggesting an alternative religious epistemology to strict foundationalism, and it will be useful for global philosophy of religion by introducing a distinct account of Reformed Epistemology based on a neglected Islamic intellectual tradition.

It should be noted that this research is not the first attempt to apply Reformed Epistemology to the Islamic context. Erik Baldwin has proposed an Islamic account of Reformed Epistemology based on the Plantingian externalist theory of Proper Functionalism. He has identified three main principles in Plantinga's theory; namely, the Dependency Thesis, the Design Thesis and the Immediacy Thesis. These elements are commonly shared by Christianity and Islam and pave the way for a Muslim to adopt the Standard Aquinas/Calvin model and to provide a uniquely Islamic extension of it. The Islamic model of warrant which Baldwin has introduced differs slightly from the Plantingian version in requiring a limited second-order awareness condition on knowledge, which he has employed to solve the Multiple Viable Extensions Objection to the Standard Aquinas/Calvin model.³

In a separate work, Baldwin and Tyler McNabb have noticed a potential defeater to the Islamic extension of the Standard Aquinas/Calvin model, by considering Qur'anic passages that seem to suggest that God might deceive the faithful for some greater good. After evaluating possible answers that a Muslim might give to this defeater, they have concluded that there is a subjective defeater for at least some Muslims' religious beliefs, which threatens the epistemic reliability of their cognitive faculties.⁴

In response, Jamie Turner has attempted to deflect the proposed epistemic defeater for Islamic belief by presenting a different interpretation of the mentioned Qur'anic passages, as well as by using epistemic circular reasoning against the potential defeater.⁵ In contrast to Baldwin and McNabb, Turner has presented a rather different Islamic account of Reformed Epistemology. While agreeing that it is possible to present an Islamic model of Reformed Epistemology based on the common theological grounds between Christianity and Islam, he has rejected Baldwin's not-totally-externalist account by criticising his modification of Plantinga's theory and the introduction of the limited awareness condition on knowledge. Instead, Turner has suggested an alternative account based on the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), which he has argued to correspond exactly with Plantinga's externalist epistemology.⁶ Moreover, he has drawn on Ibn

3 Baldwin, 'On the Prospects of an Islamic Externalist Account of Warrant'.

4 Baldwin and McNabb, 'An Epistemic Defeater for Islamic Belief?'; Baldwin and McNabb, *Plantingian Religious Epistemology and World Religions*, pp. 217–54.

5 Turner, 'An Epistemic Defeater for Islamic Belief?'

6 Turner, 'An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology'.

Taymiyya and contemporary analytic philosophers of religion to develop an epistemic approach to argue for the existence of God based on theistic signs, which aligns with his Islamic account of Reformed Epistemology.⁷

There are undeniable similarities between Ibn Taymiyya's ideas in religious epistemology and the religious epistemology of Maktab-i Tafaḳīk. For instance, both draw on insights from Islamic scriptures and adopt the Arabic terms of *fiṭra* (innate knowledge, according to the school) and *āyāt* (signs) to argue for an epistemic approach to knowing God in opposition to the prevalent philosophical and theological view (as shall be explained shortly with regards to Maktab-i Tafaḳīk). The alternative theories they present are also similar. Nevertheless, there are differences between their ideas, including how each of them explains the cognitive process of knowing God and acknowledging His existence, which makes Maktab-i Tafaḳīk's religious epistemology unique and thus worth investigating separately.⁸

In this chapter, I will first briefly define Reformed Epistemology and explain how it challenges foundationalism in religious epistemology. Having also introduced Maktab-i Tafaḳīk and its founder, Mīrzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī, I will elaborate on his religious epistemology and its application to theological issues. My main focus will be on the epistemic grounds for knowing God, with particular reference to the belief in His existence, and contrasting this with the mainstream approach in Islamic philosophical and theological traditions. Finally, I will compare the two theories by illustrating their similarities and differences.

Reformed Epistemology *versus* Strong Foundationalism

A central aim of epistemology is to investigate what counts as a justified and rational belief. The issue dates to Aristotle, who, in his famous regress argument, imagines four possibilities for the justification of beliefs and arrives at a conclusion by rejecting three of them.⁹ In order to explain Aristotle's argument, it will be helpful to briefly outline a classical categorisation of

7 Turner, 'Ibn Taymiyya on Theistic Signs and Knowledge of God'. For further developments in this contemporary debate, see the chapters by Turner and Baldwin in Part IV of the present volume.

8 The founder of Maktab-i Tafaḳīk never cites Ibn Taymiyya's works, and there is no evidence that he was even familiar with Ibn Taymiyya's ideas as they were absent from the Shī'ī environment and the seminaries in which he was educated. Therefore, the mentioned similarities are best seen as a result of the broader methodological concerns which they share, for instance, in relying on Islamic scriptures in theological issues rather than rational theories and opposition to Islamic philosophical schools. At the heart of the distinction between their religious epistemologies is the way in which they picture the *fiṭra* and its role in the cognitive structure of humankind.

9 Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, p. I.3; Bergmann, 'Foundationalism', pp. 253–59.

beliefs. Beliefs are generally divided into two categories, basic and non-basic. Basic beliefs are not inferred from or based on other beliefs, whereas non-basic beliefs are inferred from other beliefs. Additionally, beliefs that are correctly held without being inferred from other beliefs are called 'properly' basic beliefs. Some fairly non-controversial examples of properly basic beliefs are beliefs about internal mental states, such as pain, and examples of non-basic ones are complex mathematical beliefs inferred from more basic mathematical principles.¹⁰

One hypothesis on what makes a belief justified, drawn from inferentialism, states that a belief is justified if, and only if, it is inferred from other justified beliefs. According to this hypothesis, there is no properly basic belief. Therefore, if the inferentialist hypothesis is true, having rational beliefs leads to either an infinite regress in the chain of beliefs or circular reasoning, which are two of the options that Aristotle evaluates and, among many other philosophers, deems to be a vicious argument. Putting aside the vicious epistemic circularity and infinite regress in the chain of beliefs in this hypothesis, inferentialism would entail that all beliefs are unjustified as they are not based on proper foundations. This is the third option that only radical sceptics would accept.

As a result, for rational beliefs to be possible, inferentialism must be rejected and replaced with foundationalism as the only remaining option – that is, the epistemological theory that beliefs are rational if, and only if, they are either properly basic or validly inferred from properly basic beliefs.¹¹ Although properly basic beliefs are not inferred from other beliefs, they are not groundless. Such beliefs are rational and justified because they are supported by non-propositional evidence and epistemic grounds, including experience, intuition and seeming.¹² In other words, what makes a belief properly basic is the non-inferential belief-forming ability that produces it. Nonetheless, different theories about basic epistemic sources and the criteria for their validity generate various accounts of foundationalism.

According to classical foundationalism, rational immediate beliefs are either self-evident by simply seeming to be true without any doubt, such as $2 + 2 = 4$, or incorrigible in that they could not be mistaken, since they are about one's states of consciousness.¹³ René Descartes (d. 1650) famously proposed a very strong version of foundationalism that restricts properly basic beliefs to the ones based on rational intuition and introspection, and he attempted to deduce all other, even perceptual, beliefs from them.¹⁴

10 Bergmann, 'Rational Religious Belief without Arguments', pp. 535–37.

11 Bergmann, 'Rational Religious Belief without Arguments', p. 535.

12 Bergmann, 'Rational Religious Belief without Arguments', p. 537.

13 Wolterstorff, 'Introduction', p. 3.

14 Bergmann, 'Rational Religious Belief without Arguments', p. 236.

According to Cartesian foundationalism, the criteria for being properly basic is certainty, which is only gained by introspection and rational intuition.¹⁵ The central idea is that, for a belief to be justified, it should be certain and not subject to any possibility of error. Consequently, the only properly basic beliefs would be infallible, indubitable, or incorrigible beliefs.¹⁶ This foundationalist epistemological framework, alongside the demand of the European Enlightenment to base everything on reason, led to what is known as the evidentialist challenge to religious belief.¹⁷ Evidentialism posits that theism is rational if, and only if, it is supported by evidence in the form of logical arguments. Based on this, non-theistic evidentialists claim that theism is irrational since no compelling evidence supports it. Yet theists who presuppose evidentialism assert that there are valid arguments that prove the existence of God based on certain premises.¹⁸ However, these are not the only ways to deal with the evidentialist challenge to theism.

An alternative approach is to deny the assumption of evidentialism that the rationality of religious beliefs requires argumentative evidence. Religious beliefs might be argued to be rational in the same way as properly basic beliefs. This approach was adopted by some contemporary philosophers, including Nicholas Wolterstorff, William Alston and Alvin Plantinga, who later became known as the founders of Reformed Epistemology.¹⁹ Since they were influenced by the Christian Reformed tradition and figures such as John Calvin (d. 1564), particularly his teachings on the relation of faith to reason, they used the term ‘Reformed’ to denote their epistemological theory.²⁰

Plantinga, as one of the most prominent Reformed epistemologists, criticises foundationalism from several different angles. First, he argues that classical foundationalism is self-referentially incoherent. It does not satisfy its own criteria, because it is neither a properly basic belief according to its strict conditions, nor supported by a valid argument only consisting of self-evident propositions and propositions deduced from them.²¹ Moreover, classical foundationalism implies that common

15 Bergmann, ‘Foundationalism’, p. 259.

16 These terms indicate different kinds of certainty. As Poston has explained, ‘[i]nfallible beliefs are not possibly false. Indubitable beliefs are not possible to doubt even though the content may be false, and incorrigible beliefs cannot be undermined by further information’. Poston, ‘Foundationalism’.

17 Wolterstorff, ‘Introduction’, pp. 5–6.

18 Bergmann, ‘Rational Religious Belief without Arguments’, p. 538.

19 Bolos and Scott, ‘Reformed Epistemology’.

20 Wolterstorff, ‘Introduction’, p. 7.

21 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 84–86.

beliefs about the external world and other minds are unjustified because they are neither certain, basic beliefs nor supported by undoubtedly firm arguments.²² By rejecting this theory, Plantinga concludes that infallibility, incorrigibility, or indubitability are not necessary for knowledge or justification.²³ As a result, sensory beliefs are properly basic while their source does not produce infallible, indubitable, or incorrigible beliefs. Similarly, this alternative theory makes room for considering the belief in the existence of God as properly basic without assuming that it is infallible.

Under the influence of John Calvin, Plantinga claims that humans have a cognitive faculty, called the *sensus divinitatis*, which generates experiences of God and consequently leads to theistic beliefs.²⁴ This faculty produces beliefs about God, such as that 'this flower, or this vast and intricate universe, was created by God', when contemplating a flower or the starry sky, as well as 'God disapproves of me or forgives me for what I have done', after doing something wrong or when repenting.²⁵ While such beliefs are not inferred from other beliefs, they are not groundless beliefs either, because they are supported by religious experiences, in the same way as non-inferential beliefs formed on the basis of perception or memory.²⁶

Reformed Epistemology, therefore, occupies a unique position in religious epistemology and constitutes a revolution in analytic philosophy of religion. Its method in theology differs from that of natural theology, which tends to prove the existence of God and other religious tenets by arguments consisting of self-evident premises. Although it is not illegitimate to use arguments for theological purposes according to Reformed Epistemology, it is unnecessary for fundamental religious beliefs, such as the existence of God. Moreover, it should be noted that Reformed Epistemology is not at odds with foundationalism *per se*. As Bergmann has noted, while Reformed Epistemology contradicts Cartesian foundationalism, it is perfectly consistent with what he has called 'generic foundationalism'.²⁷

In philosophy of religion, there is extensive literature on different accounts of Reformed Epistemology and its challenges.²⁸ Some famous

22 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 86–88.

23 Poston, 'Foundationalism'; Bolos and Scott, 'Reformed Epistemology'; Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', pp. 71–74.

24 Bolos and Scott, 'Reformed Epistemology'; Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', pp. 80–82.

25 Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', p. 80.

26 Bergmann, 'Rational Religious Belief without Arguments', pp. 538–39; Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', pp. 78–80.

27 Bergmann, 'Foundationalism', pp. 264–65.

28 For some recent works, see Moon, 'Recent Work in Reformed Epistemology'.

objections to Reformed Epistemology are the Great Pumpkin objection,²⁹ disanalogies of religious beliefs with other properly basic beliefs, religious diversity and religious disagreement.³⁰ Proponents of Reformed Epistemology have suggested various solutions to these objections.³¹ In what follows, however, I will not discuss either these objections or the responses to them, because my aim is not to defend Reformed Epistemology. Instead, my goal is to compare it with Maktab-i Tafkik's religious epistemology, which I do not aim to evaluate either. Finally, in my comparison, I will concentrate on Plantinga's account of Reformed Epistemology as the most influential account in the literature.

Maktab-i Tafkik's Religious Epistemology

An approach similar to Reformed Epistemology was developed in the Islamic intellectual sphere by the proponents of Maktab-i Tafkik. In contrast with Reformed Epistemology, their religious epistemology was not constructed as a solution to the challenge of evidentialism, or because of the philosophical collapse of strong foundationalism, but as a response to the dominance of a foundationalist epistemic framework in Islamic thought, especially within Shī'ī seminaries.

The founder of Maktab-i Tafkik, Mīrzā Muḥammad Mahdī Gharawī Iṣfahānī Khurāsānī (d. 1365/1946), known as Mīrzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī, was born in Isfahan, Iran. During his early life, he moved to Iraq, where he studied Islamic law, legal theory, theology, philosophy and mysticism in the seminaries of Najaf and Karbala. Among his teachers were those of great fame within Shī'ī scholarship, such as Muḥammad Kāzīm Ākhūnd Khurāsānī (d. 1329/1911), Muḥammad Kāzīm Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1337/1918) and Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥusayn Gharawī Nā'īnī (d. 1355/1936), who were prominent and influential Shī'ī authorities of the era. After studying in Iraq, Iṣfahānī returned to Iran around 1333/1914–15 and settled in the city of Mashhad in Khurāsān, where he taught in the seminary and wrote

29 The objection in brief is that, if there are no criteria to determine what beliefs can be legitimately considered as properly basic beliefs, just as a Christian community can hold the theistic belief as basic, an imaginary community might consider belief in the Great Pumpkin, who returns at Halloween to the most deserving pumpkin patches, as basic without violating any rational norms, which would be rather bizarre. Different formulations of the objection are discussed, and different solutions are given in the literature.

30 Bolos and Scott, sec. 7; Bergmann, 'Rational Religious Belief without Arguments', pp. 540–47.

31 For a discussion of the objections and some solutions, see Baldwin and McNabb, *Plantingian Religious Epistemology and World Religions*, pp. 8–20; McNabb, *Religious Epistemology*.

books on Islamic disciplines of theology, law and legal theory for the rest of his life.³²

Iṣfahānī and his disciples are widely known for their opposition to Islamic mysticism (*irfān*) and philosophy (*falsafa*), especially as elaborated in the school of al-Ḥikmat al-Mutaʿaliyya (the Transcendent Philosophy) founded by the famous Shīʿī philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (d. 1045/1636). Iṣfahānī opposed prevalent philosophical and mystical theories and expressed his novel thoughts on a variety of subjects, including the nature of reason and knowledge, language and meaning, epistemology of religious beliefs and religious experiences, divine attributes and actions, the relationship between God and the world, free will and predestination, the problem of evil, prophecy, imamate and resurrection.

By spreading his thoughts and educating several students, Iṣfahānī established a theological school, which later came to be known as Maktab-i Maʿārif (the School of Cognitions), or more famously as Maktab-i Taḥkīk (the School of Separation), a term given to the group much later by Muḥammad Riḍā Ḥakīmī (d. 1400 sh./2021) in his book of the same name.³³ The latter title indicates that the central idea of this school is that Islamic doctrines should be based solely on Islamic scriptures and separated from ‘alien’ philosophical and mystical teachings.³⁴ Based on this theory, the disciplines of philosophy, mysticism and theology should be kept separate from each other, and it would be a mistake to combine the teachings of such distinct disciplines, as done by some famous figures.³⁵ Consequently, interpretation and comprehension of Islamic scriptures by means of philosophical and mystical concepts and assumptions are also considered illegitimate.³⁶ The only proper method for understanding Islamic doctrines is to derive them from the holy scriptures without the aid of philosophy or mysticism.³⁷ The idea, however, is not to deny the role of reason in understanding Islamic doctrines, or to say that Islamic doctrines are irrational, but to argue that the current philosophical and mystical traditions in the Islamic world contradict both reason and revelation.³⁸ Accordingly, Islamic philosophy and mysticism, which are considered to have originated from non-Islamic and non-religious thought instead of

32 For Iṣfahānī’s biography, see Ṭalibīyān Sharīf *et al.*, *Ihyāgar-i ḥawzi-yi Khurāsān; Nabawī Raḍawī, Mīrzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī*; Kutharī, *Shinākht nāmī-yi faqīh-i ahl-i bayt Ayatullāh Mīrzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī*.

33 Ḥakīmī, *Maktab-i Taḥkīk*.

34 Ḥakīmī, *Maktab-i Taḥkīk*, pp. 46–49.

35 Ḥakīmī, *Maktab-i Taḥkīk*, pp. 64–69.

36 Ḥakīmī, *Maktab-i Taḥkīk*, pp. 69–73.

37 Ḥakīmī, *Maktab-i Taḥkīk*, pp. 74–75.

38 Ḥakīmī, *Maktab-i Taḥkīk*, pp. 51–54.

Islamic scriptures, are called Islamic only in the sense that they were developed in Islamic civilisation.³⁹

Nevertheless, distinguishing between pure Islamic doctrines and human disciplines was not the only intention of the founder of this school. Besides criticising common philosophical and mystical theories, Iṣfahānī attempted to develop a novel Islamic and Shī‘ī systematic theology in agreement with the Qur’an and Hadith, as well as genuine knowledge (*‘ilm*) and intellect (*‘aql*). In contrast with the well-known Islamic intellectual disciplines of *falsafa* and *‘irfān*, Iṣfahānī called his teachings *ma‘ārif/‘ulūm-i ilāhī* (literally meaning divine teachings or sciences), which has been widely used as a specific term ever since. These teachings were intended to follow those of the household of the Prophet and to draw inspiration from the Shī‘ī scriptures. Consequently, Iṣfahānī’s school of thought also became known as Maktab-i Ma‘ārif-i Ahl-i Bayt (the School of the Prophet’s Household’s Teachings), abbreviated as Maktab-i Ma‘ārif, which is occasionally preferred to the more famous title of Maktab-i Tafkīk by the proponents of this school. Since the school was established in Khurāsān (a region in Eastern Iran), where Iṣfahānī taught throughout his life, it is also known as Maktab-i Ma‘ārif-i Khurāsān.

Due to the school’s original intention, the proponents of Maktab-i Ma‘ārif often explain their ideas in opposition to Islamic philosophical theories. Their main concern is about the proper method of understanding religious doctrines, especially in regard to God. They criticise the epistemological and metaphysical basis of the philosophical proofs for the existence of God. In brief, they claim that such arguments are not required to gain such knowledge. Furthermore, they argue that philosophical proofs are based on false grounds, which lead to misleading conclusions about God’s essence and attributes. In this regard, their primary concern is the epistemology of religious beliefs and theological methodology. As necessary background to an explanation of Maktab-i Tafkīk’s religious epistemology, a brief description of the common epistemological framework in Islamic philosophy will follow. This will provide the context in which the school was developed, as well as to what it was responding.

Classical Foundationalism and Beyond in the Islamic Context

Under the influence of Aristotelian logic, the popular epistemological theory among Islamic philosophical traditions and important figures, such as Avicenna, has been a version of classical foundationalism, including

39 Ḥakīmī, *Maktab-i Tafkīk*, pp. 56–59.

a strong evidentialist component. According to this framework, as elaborated in Muslim logicians' works, knowledge is depicted as being constructed from the two categories of conceptions (sing. *taṣawwur*) and assertions (sing. *taṣdīq*), which are both divided into self-evident/obvious (*ḍarūrī/badīhī*) and speculative (*naẓarī*).⁴⁰ The major part of human knowledge consists of speculative conceptions and assertions.⁴¹ Speculative conceptions are known by definitions that are ultimately based on obvious conceptions, which do not require any further definitions. Similarly, speculative assertions or propositions (sing. *qaḍīyya*) depend on arguments that contain self-evident assertions as their premises, while self-evident assertions are known without the aid of arguments.⁴²

In Islamic logical works, a regress argument similar to Aristotle's version is presented to support foundationalism, which goes as follows. Every argument consists of some premises that need to be known before they can be used in an argument. Such premises are either known based on other arguments or not. If they are known without further arguments, they are self-evident propositions that are the basis of other arguments and the foundation of their conclusions. However, if the premises are known by other arguments, the same problem occurs concerning those arguments and their premises. This regress should ultimately lead to premises that are known without any further arguments and, thus, are self-evident. Otherwise, it would imply either an infinite regress or the impossibility of knowledge, which are both contradictory and logically implausible. As a result, the possibility of knowledge requires some propositions to be self-evident so that other propositions are known based on them.⁴³ Such propositions are called *mabādi' al-maṭālib* or *mabādi' al-'aḡyisa* (the grounds of syllogisms) and are thoroughly discussed under the title of *al-ṣanā'āt al-khams* (the five arts).⁴⁴

Based on this logical framework, the proposition that God exists is regarded as speculative, not self-evident, and consequently proof of the existence of God is considered essential, which is one of the first topics discussed in Islamic philosophical theology. Several arguments are put forward for this, such as Avicenna's onto-cosmological argument known as *burhān al-ṣiddīqīn* (the proof of the veracious), which employs the concepts of existence, causation, necessity and contingency to argue for the existence of God as the ultimate necessary cause of all beings, based on the impossibility of infinite regress and circularity in the chain of existent

40 Sabziwārī, *Sharḥ al-manẓūma*, vol. 1, pp. 7–9; Muẓaffar, *Al-Manṭiq*, pp. 10–12.

41 Muẓaffar, *Al-Manṭiq*, pp. 16–17.

42 Sabziwārī, *Sharḥ al-manẓūma*, vol. 1, pp. 9–10; Muẓaffar, *Al-Manṭiq*, p. 21.

43 Sabziwārī, *Sharḥ al-manẓūma*, vol. 1, p. 88; Muẓaffar, *Al-Manṭiq*, pp. 201 and 282.

44 Sabziwārī, *Sharḥ al-manẓūma*, vol. 1, pp. 10, 87–88; Muẓaffar, *Al-Manṭiq*, p. 283.

causes and effects.⁴⁵ Even in some Islamic theological works that are not overtly philosophical, the existence of God is first proven by rational arguments, and other theological topics, such as divine attributes and prophecy, are explored only after the existence of God is demonstrated.⁴⁶

Being aware of this background, Iṣfahānī and his disciples raise several objections to the prevalent logical framework as portrayed in the Islamic intellectual context, and particularly its application to theological matters.⁴⁷ Some of their objections to this epistemic theory are as follows. First, logic and philosophy are technical disciplines that require special training, and only a few people with proper abilities and enough spare time can specialise in these fields. However, since Islamic scriptures imply that it is a universal religious duty to know God and acknowledge His existence, logic and philosophy would not help ordinary people to achieve this goal.⁴⁸

The second objection is about the definition and purpose of logic. In the Islamic tradition, logic is defined as a necessary tool to prevent humans from committing fallacies in reasoning.⁴⁹ On the contrary, Maktab-i Ma'ārif's advocates argue that logic is neither necessary nor sufficient for this aim. According to their objection, many logical principles are not self-evident, which is the reason why they are under dispute among scholars. To support this argument, sixty-six disagreements among Muslim scholars, either on the nature and definition of logic or on specific logical topics, are mentioned.⁵⁰ After arguing that logic does not satisfy the required conditions of infallibility, they pessimistically doubt if it could prevent the human mind from falling into error in other disciplines, such as philosophy and theology.⁵¹

Furthermore, even philosophical arguments rarely satisfy the conditions of a sound argument as elaborated in logic. The main reason, they explain, is that a logically sound argument is supposed to consist of certain self-evident premises, but these are rare in philosophy and are usually controversial, especially in theology. Consequently, it is predictable that there are many disputes on various philosophical topics as well.⁵² In brief,

45 On Avicenna's argument for the existence of God, see Gutas, 'Ibn Sina [Avicenna]'; Craig, *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz*, pp. 86–97; Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy*, pp. 281–310.

46 For instance, see al-Ḥillī, *Kashf al-murād fī sharḥ tajrīd al-i'tiqād*, p. 280.

47 Iṣfahānī, *Abwāb al-hudā*, pp. 110, 144–45; Iṣfahānī, *Anwār al-hidāya*, pp. 95–100; Iṣfahānī, *Ma'ārif al-qur'ān*, vol. 1, pp. 166–67, 410, 458, 461–62.

48 Ḥalabī, *Al-Tawḥīd wa-l-'adl*, p. 12; Qazwīnī Khurāsānī, *Bayān al-furqān*, pp. 36–37.

49 For instance, see Sabziwārī, *Sharḥ al-manẓūma*, vol. 1, p. 6; Muẓaffar, *Al-Manṭiq*, pp. 6–7.

50 Ḥalabī, *Al-Tawḥīd wa-l-'adl*, pp. 12–24.

51 Qazwīnī Khurāsānī, *Bayān al-furqān*, p. 37.

52 Ḥalabī, *Al-Tawḥīd wa-l-'adl*, pp. 29–31; Qazwīnī Khurāsānī, *Bayān al-furqān*, pp. 37–38.

the way in which classical foundationalism appears in the logical works of Islamic scholars is useless for theological matters and even self-contradictory in Maktab-i Ma'ārif's view. Therefore, they suggest that people rely on their natural and innate logic illuminated by the light of intellect ('*aql*), which is used by laypeople in their everyday lives, instead of studying the Aristotelian logic and employing it in their reasoning.⁵³

Followers of Maktab-i Ma'ārif consider theistic belief as obvious, self-evident and reasonably held without any arguments. Iṣfahānī argues that all people possess an innate knowledge of God that only needs to be noticed and awakened. Employing Islamic terminology and referring to passages from the Qur'an and Hadith, he calls this knowledge *fiṭra*, from the root *f-ṭ-r*, meaning bringing something into existence for the first time.⁵⁴ All humans, due to their *fiṭra* (that is, innate knowledge according to Iṣfahānī's interpretation), know God from the beginning of their creation, although they might not be aware of this knowledge when they are born in this world. As people grow up, on various occasions they acknowledge God without any prior philosophical training or familiarity with technical proofs for the existence of God. Since the existence of God is self-evident and more obvious than many other truths, the philosophical arguments that aim to prove it based on non-obvious premises would not be necessary or even helpful in demonstrating the existence of God.⁵⁵

From the causes that awaken the *fiṭra*, the most common way is seeing the signs of God in one's self or in nature.⁵⁶ According to Maktab-i Ma'ārif's view, knowing God by His signs is not equivalent to proving His existence based on them in the form of a cosmological argument.⁵⁷ Again, Maktab-i Ma'ārif's advocates adopt the frequently used Qur'anic term *āyāt* (sing. *āya*), meaning signs (of God), which are divided into *āfāqī* (external) and *anfusī* (internal) based on a related Qur'anic passage.⁵⁸ Standard examples of the former are natural sights, from mountain tops to vast oceans, and living beings, from beautiful flowers to wondrous animals. Some instances of the latter are variations in human states – such as becoming ill or healthy, eagerness or reluctance, falling asleep, waking up and growing – as mentioned in a hadith by the sixth Shī'ī imam, and all other similar variations

53 Ḥalabī, *Al-Tawḥīd wa-l-'adl*, pp. 31–32.

54 Iṣfahānī, *Abwāb al-hudā*, pp. 135, 157, 186–87; Iṣfahānī, *Anwār al-hidāya*, p. 126; Iṣfahānī, *Ma'ārif al-qur'ān*, vol. 1, pp. 391–94, 460, 471–88.

55 Ḥalabī, *Al-Tawḥīd wa-l-'adl*, pp. 9, 10–11, 41–42; Qazwīnī Khurāsānī, *Bayān al-furqān*, pp. 54–56, 156–58.

56 Ḥalabī, *Al-Tawḥīd wa-l-'adl*, p. 69.

57 Ḥalabī, *Al-Tawḥīd wa-l-'adl*, pp. 69–70.

58 Iṣfahānī, *Abwāb al-hudā*, pp. 109 and 119; Iṣfahānī, *Ma'ārif al-qur'ān*, vol. 1, p. 470; Ḥalabī, *Al-Tawḥīd wa-l-'adl*, p. 47. See Q. 41:53.

in the physical and mental states of humankind.⁵⁹ Seeing these signs and reflecting on them, albeit not in a theoretical way in the form of philosophical arguments, are standard ways of awakening the *fiṭra* in Maktab-i Ma‘ārif’s theology. However, it is worth mentioning that seeing signs and reflecting on them are not necessary steps in knowing God, as perceiving God, at the highest levels, is not by the mediation of any of His signs but immediately by Himself.⁶⁰

Facing natural disasters is another notable situation in which the innate knowledge of God is awakened.⁶¹ The person who despairs of being rescued by anyone else realises that their powerful creator is the only one who can help in this situation. A significant example that the proponents of Maktab-i Ma‘ārif cite from the Qur’an is the person who suddenly faces a massive storm while sailing in the sea. This accident makes the sailor despondent and reminds them that no one can save them but God. In such events, after the *fiṭra* is awakened, the person is reminded of God and His ultimate power and might even directly experience the presence of God, and then start praying to God and asking Him for help.⁶²

Another influential way mentioned for awakening the *fiṭra* is hearing the prophets and the imams’ reminders of God and reading them, as represented in the scriptures.⁶³ Accordingly, the Qur’an as God’s word plays a prominent role, by mentioning the signs of God and even being the sign of God, which explains why Qur’anic verses are called *āyāt*.⁶⁴ Prophets also make people notice God by speaking about the divine acts and mentioning His signs. It should be noted that, for people to benefit from prophets’ reminders or to notice God through His signs, it is not necessary that they already have faith in the prophets or even God. The only necessary condition for being reminded of God by such prophetic reminders is to possess an innate knowledge of God through the *fiṭra*, which is common among all people regardless of their faith. Similarly, the signs of God are not known based on the authority of the scriptures for the faithful; rather, they are recognised as the signs of God after one gets to know God by perceiving them.

With due consideration of the fact that people know God by their *fiṭra* even before encountering His messengers, it would be inaccurate to say

59 İsfahānī, *Anwār al-hidāya*, p. 126. For the Hadith, see al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 188.

60 İsfahānī, *Anwār al-hidāya*, pp. 100, 111–14, 126–27.

61 İsfahānī, *Abwāb al-hudā*, p. 187; İsfahānī, *Anwār al-hidāya*, pp. 127–28; İsfahānī, *Ma‘ārif al-qur‘ān*, vol. 1, pp. 398, 410, 473; Ḥalabī, *Al-Tawḥīd wa-l-‘adl*, pp. 7–8, 68–69.

62 İsfahānī, *Anwār al-hidāya*, p. 127; Ḥalabī, *Al-Tawḥīd wa-l-‘adl*, pp. 7 and 69.

63 İsfahānī, *Abwāb al-hudā*, p. 210; İsfahānī, *Anwār al-hidāya*, p. 126; İsfahānī, *Ma‘ārif al-qur‘ān*, vol. 1, pp. 394 and 427; Ḥalabī, *Al-Tawḥīd wa-l-‘adl*, p. 43.

64 İsfahānī, *Abwāb al-hudā*, p. 210; İsfahānī, *Ma‘ārif al-qur‘ān*, vol. 1, pp. 177, 256, 258, 298–99, 404.

that prophets introduce God to humans. Instead, God is the one who introduces Himself to humans by giving them the *fiṭra* in creation and then awakening it on certain occasions. In this regard, Iṣfahānī insists that no one, not even the prophets, can introduce God to people apart from Himself, and no one can know God but by His own divine will.⁶⁵ Therefore, knowing God is involuntary according to Maktab-i Ma'ārif's main tenets, which is emphasised as a crucial difference between the teachings of this school and other philosophical and mystical schools of thought.⁶⁶

Another point to mention is that a person's awareness of God might vary when seeing the signs of God, facing natural disasters, hearing the prophets and the imams' reminders, or reading the holy scriptures. In Iṣfahānī's view, the reason for this is that the cognition of God (*ma'rifat Allāh*) comes in infinite degrees.⁶⁷ After acknowledging God and acquiring faith, one can attain a higher degree of this knowledge through obedience to divine commands, commitment to religious duties and praying to God.⁶⁸ However, committing sins causes a major obstacle to attaining awareness of the divine presence, prevents the sinful from reaching the higher grades of this cognition and might even lead to absolute ignorance and total denial of God. Therefore, repentance and seeking God's forgiveness are required to assist in acquiring this divine knowledge.⁶⁹

To refer to the high levels of the knowledge of God, Iṣfahānī uses the terms *ru'ya* (seeing), *mu'āyana* (perceiving), *liqā'* (meeting) and *wiṣāl* (joining), which he borrows from Islamic scriptures and traditions. Meanwhile, he insists that, when these terms are applied to God, they should not be taken at face-value and understood by their standard meanings, which imply physical interaction and sensory perception.⁷⁰ At the high levels of this knowledge, the subject of knowledge directly feels the presence of God and perceives Him as the ultimate reality on which everything else depends. Iṣfahānī claims that this perception is by none of the human faculties, including bodily sense organs, conceptual imagination and even the intellect.⁷¹ Instead,

65 Iṣfahānī, *Abwāb al-hudā*, pp. 111–12, 115–16, 153, 214; Iṣfahānī, *Ma'ārif al-qur'ān*, vol. 1, pp. 411–24, 470, 472, 478.

66 Ḥalabī, *Al-Tawḥīd wa-l-'adl*, pp. 41–47.

67 Iṣfahānī, *Abwāb al-hudā*, pp. 111–12, 115–16, 153, 214; Iṣfahānī, *Anwār al-hidāya*, p. 150.

68 Iṣfahānī, *Abwāb al-hudā*, pp. 187–88; Iṣfahānī, *Ma'ārif al-qur'ān*, vol. 1, p. 399.

69 Iṣfahānī, *Ma'ārif al-qur'ān*, vol. 1, p. 471.

70 Iṣfahānī, *Abwāb al-hudā*, pp. 114–16, 209–10; Iṣfahānī, *Ma'ārif al-qur'ān*, vol. 1, pp. 392, 458, 460.

71 Iṣfahānī, *Abwāb al-hudā*, p. 114.

one knows God and directly perceives Him solely by the divine will through ‘the eyes of the heart’.⁷²

Maktab-i Tafsīk’s Religious Epistemology as an Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology

Based on the description of Maktab-i Tafsīk’s religious epistemology mentioned so far, it should be clear that there are remarkable similarities between its approach and Reformed Epistemology. From a negative angle, both agree that classical foundationalism is epistemically mistaken, as it leads to an unnecessary scepticism about ordinary beliefs, among which are fundamental religious beliefs. Consequently, they both deny that knowledge of philosophical arguments or any special technical training is essential for having a justified belief in the existence of God.⁷³

From a positive angle, both consider theistic belief basic as the product of a specific epistemic source common to all people: either an inner cognitive faculty called the *sensus divinitatis*,⁷⁴ or an innate knowledge of God called the *fiṭra*. The description of religious experiences that result from the *sensus divinitatis* is notably similar to Iṣfahānī’s account of knowledge of God by His signs. Plantinga gives the example of a person in grave danger who turns to God, asking for help and protection with the belief that He is able to do so,⁷⁵ which remarkably corresponds to the case of perceiving God in natural disasters which Iṣfahānī mentions along with that of the desperate sailor he cites from the Qur’an.⁷⁶

Yet there are also a number of notable differences that should be considered. Since the theories were developed in two separate contexts, the formulations and the emphases also differ. While Reformed Epistemology was presented to solve the evidentialist objection to theism, Maktab-i Ma’ārif was founded as a doctrinal school to renovate classical Shī’ī theology and defend its traditional doctrines against prevalent philosophical and mystical theological beliefs. Consequently, the target and the focus of the two approaches differ.

72 Iṣfahānī, *Anwār al-hidāya*, p. 100. Although Iṣfahānī does not use ‘religious experience’ or other similar terms, his ideas on perceiving God and consideration of such experiences as an epistemic basis for the belief in God are evidently relevant to the epistemology of religious experiences discussed in contemporary philosophy of religion, for instance, by William Alston, who is another influential Reformed epistemologist. See Alston, *Perceiving God*. Still, there are notable differences that need to be taken into account in a comparative study.

73 Iṣfahānī, *Abwāb al-hudā*, p. 187; Plantinga, ‘Reason and Belief in God’, pp. 66–67.

74 Plantinga, ‘Reason and Belief in God’, pp. 65–66.

75 Plantinga, ‘Reason and Belief in God’, p. 80.

76 Iṣfahānī, *Anwār al-hidāya*, p. 127.

For instance, while Reformed Epistemology primarily addresses theistic 'belief' and its justification, Maktab-i Ma'ārif concentrates on 'knowledge' and 'cognition' of God. According to Plantinga's reading of John Calvin, God created us with an innate tendency or inclination towards 'belief' in Him⁷⁷ and placed in us the cognitive faculty of the *sensus divinitatis* that produces 'beliefs' about God.⁷⁸ On the contrary, the primary concern of Maktab-i Ma'ārif is religious 'knowledge', and anything that might translate as religious 'belief' is only occasionally mentioned. A possible explanation is that Iṣfahānī and his followers initially address other Muslim scholars, who believe in God and take for granted that human beings truly know God, even though they disagree on how to explain this knowledge and its epistemic characteristics. The main concern of the pioneers of Reformed Epistemology is rather to demonstrate how fundamental religious beliefs are justified and reasonable in the first place.

Also, the epistemic concepts of justification, warrant and rationality are absent from Maktab-i Taḥkīk's religious epistemology; instead, the terms '*aql* (reason), '*ilm* (knowledge), *fiṭra* and *ma'rifa* (cognition) are frequently used.⁷⁹ There does not seem to be a clear correlation between the two terminologies, and further investigation is required for a thorough comparison of the terminology used in both approaches, which goes beyond the scope of this chapter. But I will note a few brief comments here. First, the followers of Maktab-i Ma'ārif draw a strict distinction between knowledge and all mental states, including different degrees of belief, which goes further than mere semantics. In contrast with the Islamic conceptualisations of different types of knowledge, Maktab-i Ma'ārif teaches that the categorisations and definitions of knowledge are all fundamentally misleading. Rather, knowledge is pictured as a unique and separate entity that is undefinable and unanalysable.⁸⁰ On this basis, the standard analysis of knowledge as a composition of true belief and something else, such as justification or warrant, would also be unacceptable.⁸¹ However, belief in its different degrees, from certainty to suspicion, is seen as a mental state totally distinct from knowledge, which might correspond to reality or

77 Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', pp. 65–66.

78 Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', p. 80.

79 For more on Iṣfahānī's rational methodology in theology and jurisprudence, see Maghsoodi, *The Role of 'aql in the Thought of Mirzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī*.

80 Iṣfahānī, *Ma'ārif al-qur'ān*, vol. 1, pp. 169–72, 335, 338, 380; Iṣfahānī, *Abwāb al-hudā*, pp. 128, 190, 222; Iṣfahānī, *Miṣbāḥ al-hudā*, pp. 515–16.

81 In this regard, from a comparative perspective, the similarities between Maktab-i Ma'ārif's epistemology and the Knowledge First Epistemology are worth considering. On the latter, see Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits*.

not and might be practically reliable or not. Nevertheless, the truth or justification of a belief plays no role in transforming it into knowledge based on Maktab-i Ma‘ārif’s teachings.⁸²

Moreover, roughly speaking, the primary concern of Maktab-i Ma‘ārif is knowledge by acquaintance rather than propositional knowledge or knowledge by description.⁸³ It might even seem that the only genuine type of knowledge according to their view is knowledge by acquaintance, which is a non-judgemental, non-propositional and non-conceptual direct form of awareness of an object, rather than knowing that something is such and such a thing. Insisting on knowledge by acquaintance should be considered a departure from Plantingian Reformed Epistemology and classical debates in analytic epistemology, which are mainly concerned with propositional knowledge. But again, we should be cautious in employing such terms in characterising Maktab-i Ma‘ārif’s epistemology, as there may be differences depending on how knowledge by acquaintance is defined, because knowledge of an object, based on Maktab-i Ma‘ārif’s teachings, does not always require the object’s existence as explained in their view on the ‘knowledge without an object of knowledge’ (*al-ilm bi-lā-ma‘lūm*).⁸⁴

It is also noteworthy that, according to Maktab-i Ma‘ārif, knowledge, and particularly knowledge of God, is not produced by any means or cognitive faculties. As a result, the *fiṭra* is interpreted as the innate knowledge of God not a faculty that produces knowledge or beliefs about God. This is a significant departure from Plantinga’s theory of Proper Functionalism. Based on Plantingian Proper Functionalism, having knowledge requires warrant, which is obtained in the following circumstances:

- 1) The cognitive faculties involved in the production of S’s belief B are functioning properly.
- 2) S’s cognitive environment is sufficiently similar to the one for which S’s cognitive faculties were designed.
- 3) The purpose of S’s design plan governing the production of B is the production of true beliefs.

82 İsfahānī, *Abwāb al-hudā*, pp. 105–8; İsfahānī, *Al-Uṣūl al-wasīṭ*, p. 221; İsfahānī, *Miṣbāḥ al-hudā*, pp. 501–4.

83 For the distinction, see Hasan and Fumerton, ‘Knowledge by Acquaintance vs. Description’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/knowledge-acquaindescrip>.

84 For instance, see İsfahānī, *Ma‘ārif al-qur‘ān*, vol. 2, pp. 197, 198; İsfahānī, *Abwāb al-hudā*, pp. 119, 234, 245, 247; İsfahānī, *Anwār al-hidāya*, pp. 136, 137, 155, 159, 161, 186; and İsfahānī, *Al-Uṣūl al-wasīṭ*, pp. 212, 213, 214.

- 4) S's design plan is a good one in that there is a high statistical or objective probability that a belief produced in accordance with the relevant segment of the design plan in that sort of environment is true.⁸⁵

Nonetheless, cognitive faculties and other elements of Proper Functionalism are totally absent from Maktab-i Ma'ārif's epistemology and, consequently, play no role in acquiring knowledge of God.⁸⁶ Another important point to mention is that religious experiences under Reformed Epistemology do not provide a non-defeasible *ultima facie* justification for theism, but a defeasible *prima facie* one that, in principle, could be defeated by contrary evidence.⁸⁷ Although Reformed epistemologists hold that arguments are not required for a justified theistic belief, they are open to examining counter arguments and claim that, in theory, they might even give up their basic beliefs in virtue of such arguments.⁸⁸ Proponents of Maktab-i Ma'ārif, however, see no place for philosophical arguments in acknowledging or denying the existence of God. They regard the innate knowledge of God as certain and unquestionable, and even more obvious than many other instances of ordinary knowledge.⁸⁹ Indeed, they consider theism among the most obvious and evident beliefs, to the extent that no other basic belief or argument would have the strength to undermine it. This view results from their more fundamental epistemic and theological grounds concerning knowledge of God and how it differs from other kinds of knowledge, especially due to the point that there is no mediation between the subject and God when one directly perceives and encounters God. As further theological evidence, they cite the verse mentioned in the introduction and the title of this chapter: 'Is there any doubt about God, the originator of the heavens and the earth?'⁹⁰ In other words, their criticism of classical foundationalism, in contrast with Reformed Epistemology, does not proceed by weakening the criteria for knowledge or justification and considering some non-certain fallible beliefs as knowledge. Rather,

85 Baldwin and McNabb, *Plantingian Religious Epistemology and World Religions*, pp. 15–16. For a thorough discussion, see Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*.

86 It is unclear whether Iṣfahānī's epistemology accurately falls within either epistemic internalism or externalism. Some elements of his theory support the former, while others support the latter. Nevertheless, disagreements among Maktab-i Ma'ārif's advocates on the interpretation of the related epistemic issues and the details of Iṣfahānī's epistemology make it particularly difficult to compare it with Plantinga's externalism.

87 Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', pp. 77 and 80.

88 Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', pp. 83–84.

89 Iṣfahānī, *Anwār al-hidāya*, p. 127.

90 Q. 14:10. For instance, see Iṣfahānī, *Anwār al-hidāya*, p. 127; Ḥalabī, *Al-Tawḥīd wa-l-'adl*, p. 42.

they object to the strict restrictions of philosophical foundationalism on what counts as knowledge and what beliefs can be held without further argument while maintaining an even higher standard for knowledge. This excludes some instances of the alternative account of knowledge and includes others, such as knowledge of God.

Finally, according to Reformed Epistemology, sin plays a central role in explaining why the *sensus divinitatis* does not function properly in all people, such that they believe in God without asking for arguments.⁹¹ However, due to the absence of the doctrine of original sin in Islamic theology, this is not the case for Maktab-i Ma‘ārif. Accordingly, while all people know God from the day they are born as a result of their *fiṭra*, they are also naturally ignorant of this knowledge. After people grow up, they notice God in those situations that awaken the *fiṭra*.⁹² Although sin is among the many causes that prevent people from becoming aware of God, so that asking for forgiveness helps people to get closer to knowing God,⁹³ not all those who are ignorant of God are so because of the sins they carry. Hence, they are not accountable for their involuntary ignorance of God.⁹⁴

Conclusion

In summary, after mentioning the central tenets of Reformed Epistemology and briefly introducing Maktab-i Taḥkīk’s theological method, I have compared their views on religious epistemology with regard to theism. As indicated, there are remarkable similarities between the two accounts in terms of what they negate and what they affirm. From a negative aspect, they both deny classical foundationalism and the idea that philosophical arguments are essential for theism. From a positive aspect, they both consider belief in the existence of God as basic and introduce a special epistemic source for this belief. Nonetheless, due to the distinct backgrounds of each school, their theories differ in some crucial respects – that is, the concepts employed, the epistemic framework presented, the place of rational arguments in theology, the defeasibility of theistic belief by contrary evidence and the role of sin in explaining the ignorance of God.

Hopefully, reflecting on the differences between the two theories here will be insightful in drawing out the potential of Reformed Epistemology and the possibility of developing modified accounts of the theory that avoid some of the objections raised against it, which might in fact only threaten

91 Plantinga, ‘Reason and Belief in God’, pp. 66 and 90; *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 166–98.

92 Iṣfahānī, *Anwār al-hidāya*, pp. 125–28.

93 Iṣfahānī, *Ma‘ārif al-qur’ān*, vol. 1, p. 471.

94 Ḥalabī, *Al-Tawḥīd wa-l-‘adl*, pp. 67–69.

some formulations of the core idea. Furthermore, considering Maktab-i Taḥkīk's parallel theory as an alternative epistemic approach to the standard classical foundationalism in Islamic theology will help broaden the horizons of the current field and enrich analytic Islamic theology by drawing on insights from contemporary analytic philosophy, as well as a neglected Islamic intellectual tradition, which can be subject to further historical analysis, critical evaluation, theoretical refinement and development.

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CHAPTER 9

Knowing God Personally: Second-person Knowledge in Christian and Islamic Analytic Theology

David Worsley

Introduction

Recent work in analytic epistemology has attended to the possibility and scope of a propositionally irreducible second-person knowledge of persons.¹ In this chapter, I intend (1) to show how such intersubjective knowledge has been employed in recent Christian analytic theology;² and (2) to gesture, tentatively, towards ways in which a focus on such second-person knowledge might be employed in Islamic analytic theology (and specifically, Islamic analytic spirituality).

I begin with some scene-setting. There is a common enough caricature of the analytic philosopher as someone uninterested in that which cannot be expressed in propositions. Because this caricature is widespread, it is reasonable to ask whether non-propositional modes of knowing should find themselves within the domain of an analytic theologian's inquiry. I follow Rea in thinking that something might count as a work of analytic theology insofar as it shares a family resemblance with paradigm exemplars.³ Of course, one

1 For example, Benton, 'Epistemology Personalised'; Talbert, 'Knowing Other People'.

2 For instance, Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*; Stump, 'Theology and the Knowledge of Persons'; Benton, 'God and Interpersonal Knowledge'; Keller, 'Divine Ineffability and Franciscan Knowledge'; Efrd and Worsley, 'What Can an Apophaticist Know?'; Worsley, 'On Knowing an Ineffable God Personally'.

3 Rea has written: 'Given this characterization of analytic philosophy, I take analytic theology to be, more or less, theology done with the ambitions of an analytic philosopher, in a style that conforms to the prescriptions that are distinctive of analytic philosophical discourse, and in dialogue with the literature of analytic philosophy. I say "more or less" because I am not so much identifying necessary and sufficient conditions as characteristics that mark a family resemblance; and, to my mind, it is the "in dialogue with the literature of analytic philosophy" characteristic that is typically the most salient marker of that resemblance'. Rea, 'Introduction', p. 6.

might think that these paradigm cases ought to be in some way related, but plausible candidates for these relations seem open only to rough characterisation: a broad commitment to constructive interdisciplinary theological activity, often carried out in dialogue with work produced by analytic philosophers, loosely adopting the following oft-cited rhetorical style:

- Writ[ing] as if philosophical positions and conclusions can be adequately formulated in sentences that can be formalised and logically manipulated.
- Prioritis[ing] precision, clarity and logical coherence.
- Avoid[ing] substantive (not merely decorative) use of metaphor and other tropes whose semantic content outstrips their propositional content.
- Work[ing] as much as possible with well-understood primitive concepts, as well as concepts that can be analysed in terms of those.
- Treat[ing] conceptual analysis (insofar as it is possible) as a source of evidence.⁴

I bring this up because, in such a rough and ready characterisation, one might well conclude analytic theologians ought only to be interested in that which can be reduced to propositions. And of course, this thought would be a mistake. Eleonore Stump's *Wandering in Darkness* stands as a paradigm example of analytic theology, if anything is, with at least a third of her book taken up with an analysis of the possibility and scope of non-propositional knowledge, what she calls 'Franciscan knowledge'. In what follows, I will outline part of her account before showing how recent developments in analytic spirituality have expanded upon her work.

Stump's Account of Franciscan Knowledge

In *Wandering in Darkness*, Stump has introduced a distinction between two kinds of knowledge, Dominican knowledge and Franciscan knowledge.⁵ Dominican knowledge is propositional knowledge – that is, knowledge-that (roughly, the state of mind consisting in a subject's attitude to a true proposition, or knowledge *de dicto*). Franciscan knowledge, however, is neither propositional nor reducible to propositional knowledge. Such knowledge might include knowledge gained from phenomenal experience, or from direct acquaintance (roughly, knowledge *de re*), or from second-person experience of persons (knowledge *de te*), or so she

⁴ Rea, 'Introduction', p. 3.

⁵ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, pp. 40–63.

has suggested.⁶ This much is easy to say. However, given the irreducibility of Franciscan knowledge to Dominican knowledge, providing any meaningful analysis of Franciscan knowledge is challenging. While Dominican knowledge can be expressed propositionally, even propositionally about persons, for example, that US President Joe Biden knows that Donald Trump was his predecessor, by definition, Franciscan knowledge cannot be expressed in this way.⁷ Noting this difficulty, Stump has written:

I want to claim that there is a kind of knowledge of persons, a Franciscan knowledge, which is non-propositional and which is not reducible to knowledge that. What could that possibly be?, a skeptical objector may ask. But, of course, if I give an answer to the skeptic's question, I will have an incoherent position: in answering the question, I will be presenting in terms of knowledge that what I am claiming could not be presented that way.⁸

To support the distinction between these two types of knowledge, Stump has reworked Frank Jackson's famous knowledge argument. Stump has asked us to imagine Mary, a person locked in a room since birth. Mary has never experienced a second-person encounter with her mother, and neither does she have access to any first- or second-person account of her mother. Nevertheless, in her room Mary has access (through encyclopaedias and computers) to all relevant third-personal information (that is, all relevant true propositions) about the existence of her loving mother, along with all that science can teach about her. Stump has written:

When Mary is first united with her mother, it seems indisputable that Mary will know things she did not know before, even if she

6 Stump has distinguished 'Franciscan knowledge' from the 'knowledge-how' ability hypothesis that Laurence Nemirow ('Physicalism and the Cognitive Role of Acquaintance'), David Lewis ('What Experience Teaches') and Paul Churchland ('Knowing Qualia. A Reply to Jackson') have discussed. The knowledge-how ability hypothesis suggests that experience gives us an ability and nothing more; an ability to remember, imagine or recognise what it is like to have that experience. There is no new knowledge gained at all in this process. The position that Stump has taken up, then, is closer to Earl Conee's 'acquaintance' hypothesis ('Phenomenal Knowledge'). For Conee, there is no new propositional knowledge gained by experience, but there is something gained beyond mere know-how; namely, acquaintance with the thing known. However, while Franciscan knowledge might include both knowledge of persons and acquaintance, knowledge of persons is not the same as acquaintance (or phenomenal knowledge). See Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, p. 52.

7 I will later use the term 'propositional ineffability' to describe this feature of Franciscan knowledge.

8 Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, p. 52.

knew everything about her mother that could be made available to her in non-narrative propositional form, including her mother's psychological states. Although Mary knew that her mother loved her before she met her, when she is united with her mother, Mary will learn what it is like to be loved. And this will be new for her, even if in her isolated state she had as complete a scientific description as possible of what a human being feels like when she senses that she is loved by someone else.⁹

What Stump is committing to in this account of knowledge is at odds with, for instance, one traditional analysis of Jackson's original thought experiment that suggests Mary merely learns something old in a new way.¹⁰ In this view, which Stump has rejected, the particular kind of Franciscan knowledge in question, what Stump has described as knowledge of persons, the 'something new', is in fact in some sense captured by what was previously known – namely, pertinent propositional knowledge (the 'something old'). Rather, for Stump, what Mary learns is not something old in a new way, but something entirely new.

Second-person Knowledge as a Species of Franciscan Knowledge

Now, it is not clear to me that this thought experiment really does capture knowledge *de te* as distinct from knowledge *de re*.¹¹ However, Matthew Benton's recent work on interpersonal knowledge has, I think, provided

9 Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, p. 52.

10 Churchland has written, for instance, that 'the difference between a person who knows all about the visual cortex but has never enjoyed a sensation of red, and a person who knows no neuroscience but knows well the sensation of red, may reside not in what is respectively known by each (brain states by the former, qualia by the latter), but rather in the different type of knowledge each has of exactly the same thing. The difference is in the manner of the knowing, not in the nature(s) of the thing known'; Churchland, 'Knowing Qualia: A Reply to Jackson', p. 24. Whether or not Churchland's response works in Jackson's Mary example, it simply could not work if we replaced Mary's mother with a personally knowable but propositionally ineffable God, about whom there are simply no fundamentally true propositions to leave in Mary's room.

11 In recent work, Zagzebski has offered an alternative reading of the Mary thought experiment. For Zagzebski, regardless of whether Mary's conscious state can be reduced to propositional content without remainder, Mary's subjective state, the what-it-is-like for Mary to have this conscious state, is entirely new; Zagzebski, *Omnisubjectivity*, p. 8. Because only the subject of a conscious state can know what it is like to be the subject of that conscious state, Zagzebski has thought that subjective states cannot be reduced to anything in the world of objective facts. Of course, while the first-person privacy of subjectivity might support a claim about its propositional irreducibility, this privacy

a helpful way of showing how we might understand this distinction and, therefore, how we might categorise this particular species of Franciscan knowledge. In Benton's view, what we are calling second-person knowledge (knowledge *de te*) is:

knowledge [of] a state of minds, involving a subject's attitude to another [...] mind. Roughly, interpersonal knowledge is had when two individuals know each other personally, as subjects, from the second-person perspective.¹²

This is to be distinguished, Benton thinks, from 'first-grade' personal involvement, where one comes to know second-hand propositional facts about another person, and from 'second-grade' personal involvement, where one has perceptual access to the person, and so can secure propositional or acquaintance knowledge of them (Benton thinks such knowledge includes both propositional and a non-propositional 'qualitative' knowledge). For Benton, second-person personal knowledge necessarily requires a 'third grade' of personal involvement, described as follows:

A treatment by a subject S toward its recipient R is second-personal in virtue of S treating R as a subject (an individual 'you'), where S offers some of S's own thoughts, words, or emotions to R, and S is, or for the most part intends to be, attentive to R's thoughts, words, or emotions [...] We might say that such [...] encounters bring the mind of the known subject itself right into the subjective life of the knower's mind, and thus their occasion for interpersonal knowing is, as our gloss has it, a state of minds meeting.¹³

With this, I take it that Franciscan second-person personal knowledge (*de te*) amounts to propositionally irreducible knowledge of the mind of another person and is available *via* a form of 'mind-reading' (to use a term employed by both Stump and Benton).

also limits its use in any analysis of second-personal knowledge of (other) persons. Zagzebski has gotten around this by positing the possibility of a union of subjective states. As I read her, grasping such through one's imagination (or 'counteractually') tracks Stump's account of knowledge of persons, and when grasped through an actual union of subjectivity, tracks Benton's one; Zagzebski, *Omnisubjectivity*, p. 158.

12 Benton, 'God and Interpersonal Knowledge', p. 421.

13 Benton, 'God and Interpersonal Knowledge', p. 424. I will leave to one side Benton's reciprocity condition, in part as it is not clear to me that second-person knowledge of another does require this. If the reciprocity condition is left intact, it is a lot harder to see how one could achieve second-person knowledge of another through narratives, as I will discuss below.

Personal Knowledge and Divine Love

Why go to all this effort to defend the irreducibility of Franciscan personal knowledge to Dominican knowledge? For Stump, I take it that the answer to this question has something to do with the nature of love and with a puzzle associated with divine ineffability. I will outline each of these motivations in turn.

In her work, Stump has developed an explicitly Thomist conception of love. In this view, love is understood as a systems level feature that emerges as the function of two desires: the desire for the good of the beloved, and the desire for union with the beloved. In the case of divine-human love, Stump has thought that these two desires coalesce and so can be analysed as one – namely, the desire for union with the beloved.¹⁴

For both Aquinas and Stump, union comes in two forms, either affective or real. Affective union amounts to the union of one mind with another.¹⁵

- 14 A reviewer helpfully asked whether a person's act of desiring the good for God would undermine divine impassibility. Impassibility was traditionally taken to rule out a certain state of the sensory appetite (a *passio*), a state that requires bodily senses, and therefore a body. God does not have a body, and nothing about desiring the good for God requires God to have a body. Impassibility does not rule out emotion, however. God, through contemplation of his own essence, has joy. Concerning the way in which these two desires of love coalesce in the case of God, Stump has written: 'Because Aquinas sees goodness as God's nature under a certain description, on Aquinas's views a person who has a desire for a will that wills the good is in effect a person who has a desire for God . . . [This] is thus one of the desires of love of God, namely, the desire of love that seeks union with the beloved. It is a desire for a person, where the person is God. And since the good for God consists in goodness in general, a person who wants a will that wills the good is in effect also desiring the good for God . . .'; Stump, *Image of God*, p. 90.
- 15 For more on affective (or 'formal') union, see *Summa Theologica* I-II, Q. 28, A. 1. Aquinas writes: 'The union of lover and beloved is twofold. The first is real union; for instance, when the beloved is present with the lover. The second is union of affection: and this union must be considered in relation to the preceding apprehension; since movement of the appetite follows apprehension. Now love being twofold, viz. love of concupiscence and love of friendship; each of these arises from a kind of apprehension of the oneness of the thing loved with the lover. For when we love a thing, by desiring it, we apprehend it as belonging to our well-being. In like manner when a man loves another with the love of friendship, he wills good to him, just as he wills good to himself: wherefore he apprehends him as his other self, in so far, to wit, as he wills good to him as to himself. Hence a friend is called a man's "other self" (Ethic. ix, 4), and Augustine says (Confess. iv, 6), "Well did one say to his friend: Thou half of my soul". The first of these unions is caused "effectively" by love; because love moves man to desire and seek the presence of the beloved, as of something suitable and belonging to him. The second union is caused "formally" by love; because love itself is this union or bond. In this sense Augustine says (De Trin. viii, 10) that "love is a vital principle uniting, or seeking to unite two together, the lover, to wit, and the beloved". For in describing it as "uniting" he refers to the union of affection, without which there is no love: and in saying that "it seeks to unite", he refers to real union.' See also Pruss, *One Body*, pp. 31–33.

For Stump, such knowledge can be unrequited (although for Benton, who thinks interpersonal knowledge is bound by a ‘principle of symmetry’ – that is, ‘S knows R only if [and to the extent that] R knows S’¹⁶ – such knowledge clearly cannot).¹⁷

16 Benton, ‘God and Interpersonal Knowledge’, p. 426.

17 In Stump’s view, one can be affectively united to a fictional character, or to a long dead historical character, or to a friend on the other side of the world. It is worth noting at this point that Benton’s principle of symmetry (‘God and Interpersonal Knowledge’) emphatically rules out the possibility of unrequited knowledge of persons. However, this principle of symmetry is controversial, and I find it unpersuasive. Stump, for instance, has suggested that, while on the cross Christ could mind-read – and so know, personally – the minds of all persons, past, present and future, regardless of whether such persons knew Christ. See Chapter Five of Stump’s *Atonement* for more on this point. To see why this principle might be controversial, consider the following: (1) Bob does not know God; hence, given the principle of symmetry, God cannot know Bob. But if Bob and I do know each other, I can know something a putatively omniscient God does not know – namely, Bob. (2) I know Bob, and I also know God. Bob does not know God, so God does not know Bob. Insofar as my knowledge of Bob is in my mind, God cannot come to know that part of my mind, because knowing that part would require God knowing Bob (unless, of course, knowledge *de te* reduces to knowledge *de re*, but Benton has argued it does not). Therefore, it also seems that whether or not Bob knows God will affect the extent to which God can know me (certainly God might know that I know Bob and might have acquaintance knowledge of Bob, but that is not at stake here). (3) Bob and I know each other. Unbeknownst to me, Bob passes away. Given symmetry, a second after his death, because Bob no longer knows me, I no longer know Bob, even though a second before his death, I did, and nothing has changed in me (although, if, miraculously, Bob is brought back to life, I would know Bob again). Assuming a more or less veridical answer can be offered to the counterfactual ‘What would Bob have done in X situation?’ while Bob is alive, I see no reason to think the same answer cannot be given immediately after Bob passes away. If offering a veridical answer requires some second-person knowledge in the former answer, it would be surprising if this could not be the case in the latter. (4) Bob has been married for sixty years to a sleeper agent. It surely seems right to say Bob never really knew his spouse (assuming Bob did not know he was married to a sleeper agent). Given symmetry, even if Bob was an open book, the sleeper agent cannot know Bob personally. This, too, seems a surprising result, given that the sleeper agent could offer a veridical response to the counterfactual question asked in (3). These situations aside, it is also hard to see how such knowledge might grow, as it requires both minds working in exactly the same way at exactly the same time (each knowing the other ‘to the same extent’). Any misfire on either side and personal knowledge fails to grow (although acquaintance knowledge might grow). As mentioned in note 11 above, although neither Benton nor Stump reference her work, I think Zagzebski’s recent (2023) account of shared subjectivity offers a useful way to think through relative merits of Stump and Benton’s explanations. As I read the three views, Stump has permitted the possibility of a counterfactual shared subjective state, achieved by one person through their imagination. Grasping this imagined shared subjective state can confer Franciscan knowledge of persons, even if this amounts to Franciscan knowledge of an imagined person. Benton’s account rules this out as knowledge, focusing solely, in Zagzebski’s terms, on one’s grasp of an actual union of subjective states. No doubt this latter route is preferable in achieving knowledge of actual persons, but I do not think it to be the only route to knowledge of persons (fictional, deceptive, deceased, or otherwise).

Stump has used the language of ‘personal closeness’ to capture ‘affective union’. In her account, personal closeness has two conditions: (1) personal revelation of the beloved to their lover, and (2) personal need of the lover for the beloved. For (1) to obtain, the beloved must reveal something of their mind to the lover (even if done *via* an author, in the case of fictional characters, or a biographer, in the case of historical characters). To satisfy (2), the lover must be willing to receive this revelation and from this revelation must be able to, as it were, reconstruct the mind of the beloved in their own mind (albeit imaginatively, ‘offline’, as it were).¹⁸ Broadly speaking, Stump has understood this as a form of empathy. By recreating the mind of the beloved in one’s own mind, one can (to the extent that one’s recreation is accurate) see the world as the other sees it, experiencing their sorrows and their joys as if they were one’s own.¹⁹

Affective union, of course, cannot be all that is desired in love. If the best one could hope for is the sort of union possible between yourself and a fictional character, this would be an impoverished account indeed. Added to affective union is, therefore, real union. Real union is marked by mutual personal closeness (that each, both lover and beloved, reveal themselves to the other, and that both be willing and able to receive the other’s revelation) and has, in addition to this, what Stump describes as ‘significant personal presence’. Stump has outlined the necessary and together sufficient conditions for such significant personal presence as follows: (3) unmediated causal and cognitive contact between lover and beloved, (4) some second personal encounter between both, where (5) both are engaged in either dyadic joint attention (attending to each other in some immediate fashion) or triadic joint attention (attending to each other *via* an intermediary object).²⁰

18 Both Benton and Stump offer evidence from neurobiology (for instance, the existence of mirror neurons) to support the possibility of this claim. For example, Benton has written: ‘Arguably these two-way interactions make up the (low-level) mindreading and resonance processes undergirding recent discoveries in cognitive science concerning simulation, mirror neurons, and joint attention, and thus these are fundamental to knowing another person second personally . . .’; Benton, ‘God and Interpersonal Knowledge’, p. 423. However, the evidence that both employ for this claim has recently come under a significant degree of pressure. See, for example, Leidenhag, ‘The Challenge of Autism for Relational Approaches to Theological Anthropology’.

19 For a much fuller account of her work on union and love, see Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, pp. 85–126.

20 Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, pp. 109–28. Concerning the importance of dyadic attention, Stump has written: ‘In my view, for mentally fully functional adult human beings, full-fledged dyadic joint attention is required for significant, as distinct from minimal, personal presence. If Jerome were to say of Paula, “She was distracted all through dinner and was never really present to me”, one of the things he would be complaining about would be Paula’s failure to share her attention with him. Conversely, if Paula was more

Of course, significant personal presence can only obtain when two wills are operative, each desiring to attend to the other; therefore, in her view, unrequited significant personal presence is impossible (ruling out significant personal presence with fictional or historical characters).²¹ Stump has a story to tell about how significant personal presence can be inhibited between real persons, too (through lack of desire, through literal distance, through physical pain, or through psychological pain such as guilt or shame).²² But on the assumption that none of these inhibitors obtain, lover and beloved can be really united, rather than merely affectively united, to the degree that they both share significant personal presence with each other.

The Gradability of Personal Knowledge

As so far presented, both affective and real union can be graded. The greater the degree of personal revelation (and the corresponding willingness and ability to know), the greater the degree of affective union; the fewer inhibitors one has to significant personal presence with one's beloved (and *vice versa*), the greater the intensity of real union with the beloved. Indeed, the very possibility of such gradation is another way in which such second-personal knowledge is different from propositional knowledge. In addition to being propositionally irreducible, such second-personal knowledge comes in degrees. You can know one person better than you know another, and you can come to know a person better.

This capacity for gradation is neatly captured in Bonnie Talbert's recent analysis of personal knowledge.²³ In her view, for me to know someone, person X, well is 'normally the product of a sequence of interactions' that have, minimally, the following features:

1. That I have had a significant number of second-person face-to-face interactions with X, at least some of which have been relatively recent.

present to her daughter Julia after she had given away her fortune than she was while she was wealthy, then Paula in her poor state would be more often or more deeply attentive to Julia, where the attentiveness in question requires shared attention of the dyadic sort. Finally, once we see that shared attention is required for personal presence, we can see why someone's having direct and unmediated cognitive and causal connection with another person is insufficient for her being present to him . . . ' (p. 117).

- 21 Stump has taken the attribute of omnipresence to entail that God is always and everywhere open to significant personal presence with human persons.
- 22 See Stump, *Atonement*, for a detailed discussion on inhibitors to significant personal presence.
- 23 I thank David Efird for introducing me to Talbert's work.

2. That the contexts of those interactions were such as to permit X to reveal important aspects of themselves, and X has done so.
3. That X has not deceived me about themselves in important respects.
4. That I have succeeded in accurately perceiving what X has revealed – that is, I am not ‘blinded’ by my own biases or other impairments.²⁴

As Talbert has seen it, the satisfaction of these conditions together constitutes a ‘breadth requirement’ for knowing a person well, with reflection on each helping us to ‘map out features of interactions ordinarily necessary to ground claims to know someone well’.²⁵ In addition to these breadth requirement conditions, Talbert has also proposed the following ‘depth requirement’:

[T]he history of our interactions contains at least a ‘critical mass’ of shared experiences that were deeper in cognitive and/or emotive content than we typically have with mere acquaintances – i. e. contexts in which thoughts and feelings we take to be meaningful and important were shared.²⁶

As each of these breadth and depth conditions can be satisfied more or less well, it is evident that I can come to know someone better through a higher frequency of second-person interactions, in more varied contexts, or with greater degrees of revelation and perception. The more that these conditions are satisfied, the better I will come to know the other person.

The connection between these accounts of second-person knowledge and love hardly needs spelling out: second-person knowledge is the knowledge that makes affective union possible, and being significantly personally present to another is both a mode of and an occasion for the acquisition of such second-person knowledge (indeed, not just a mode or an occasion, but the *best* mode, and the *best* occasion).²⁷

Personal Knowledge, Union and Divine Ineffability

In the case of a person’s desire for union with God, Stump has thought that both affective and real union coalesce in the Beatific Vision. In her view, at this point, a person will have the greatest degree of real union (and

24 Talbert, ‘Knowing Other People’, p. 194.

25 Talbert, ‘Knowing Other People’, p. 196.

26 Talbert, ‘Knowing Other People’, p. 200.

27 For Benton, as I read him, this is the only mode of and occasion for acquiring second-person knowledge.

so, affective union) with God as it is possible for them to have.²⁸ But now we run into a problem for divine-human union. How can a finite, limited human person ever hope to come to know the mind of a (putatively) ineffable God? Even positing this as a possibility looks like a recipe for idolatry.²⁹

Well, here is where Stump's work on the irreducibility of Franciscan knowledge to Dominican knowledge might come to our aid. If Franciscan knowledge of persons is indeed by its very nature beyond description, and if, roughly speaking, to be ineffable is to be beyond description – that is, to have the property of not being expressible – all Franciscan knowledge of persons must be in some sense ineffable.³⁰ We can call this sort of ineffability 'propositional ineffability' – the impossibility of capturing something through propositional description. Divine ineffability, where 'ineffability' is understood as 'propositional ineffability', seems fairly straightforward. If, as Stump has suggested, knowledge of other persons can be propositionally ineffable, it is easy to see how God, too, could be, in some analogical sense, propositionally ineffable.

Of course, there is one important difference between knowledge of God and knowledge of other persons. When it comes to knowledge of human persons, Franciscan knowledge could arise from one learning something old in a new way (see above). But, for the defender of ineffability so construed, that is simply not possible for our knowledge of God. It cannot be the case that what we learn of God from the Beatific Vision is something old in a new way, for, if God is in any sense ineffable, there is a sense in which we can know nothing old (that is, nothing that is reducible to propositional form) about God.³¹

28 This account of the Beatific Vision has loving union as the motivation, rather than a sort of Aristotelian selfishly motivated intellectual itch-scratching. Stump has more to say about this in her *Image of God*.

29 Indeed, each person will come to God in a unique way, so no two people will share the same personal knowledge of God.

30 I realise that the property of not being expressible does not map neatly on to traditional conceptions of ineffability. See Worsley, 'On Knowing an Ineffable God Personally', for a development on this point.

31 A reviewer has helpfully asked: 'Why cannot it be the case that we learn something propositional from scripture in a new (personal) way. For example (using Islamic examples): Q. 75:22–23: "Faces that day will be radiant, gazing at their Lord". Or the hadith, "You will see your Lord on the Day of Resurrection like you see this [full moon] . . ."; al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 3, 1501'. The point at issue here is twofold. In the first instance, if one takes a strong view of divine transcendence, one that endorses the claim that there are no fundamentally true propositions about God, no proposition can capture the nature of God in a fundamental sense; see Jacobs, *The Ineffable, Inconceivable, Incomprehensible God*, for more on the distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental truth. If beatific knowledge (new knowledge) can be reduced to propositional knowledge (old knowledge), then arguably beatific knowledge adds

If we can sensibly talk about God being propositionally ineffable, there is another sort of ineffability, reserved for those who do not (or cannot) make themselves open to any sort of second-personal interaction. For want of a better expression, we can call this 'personal ineffability'. Could God be personally ineffable? To qualify for personal ineffability God would have to refrain from making himself open to any second-personal experience (or more strongly, that God's creation would be necessarily incapable of second-personal experience of God).

Personal ineffability does not seem so far-fetched (and certainly not so far-fetched if one denies that God has anything analogous to a mind), but for adherents of the Abrahamic faiths I think there is good reason to reject personal ineffability. On Stump's account (but not Benton's),³² second-person knowledge can be transmitted through narrative, just as it can be through unmediated second-personal experience.³³ In order to be personally ineffable, God would have to refrain from any revelation of Himself through narrative (or again, more strongly, that it is impossible for God to reveal Himself through narrative), yet this claim is precisely what each Abrahamic faith endorses.³⁴

The Transmission of Personal Knowledge through Narrative

Of course, for the reasons she has mentioned above, Stump has not been able to explain exactly how narratives transmit knowledge of persons, but even so, she has been willing to defend this claim:

I [have] argued that a story, which is a second-person account, can give us something of what we would have had if we ourselves had

nothing more to propositional knowledge, rendering it redundant, while the assertion of propositional knowledge denies divine ineffability (based on the strong view of divine transcendence). In the specific example given, if personal knowledge involves knowledge of the mind of the other (as both Stump and Benton have thought to be the case), knowing that your face will be radiant and that you 'will see your Lord . . .' does not lead to knowledge of the mind of God any more than Mary knowing that she will meet her mother when she turns eighteen furnishes her with personal knowledge of her mother. (Controversially, imagining yourself at the Beatific Vision might get you closer. For more on imaginative engagement with narrative, see section nine below). Finally, if Zagzebski is right that subjectivity cannot be reduced to anything in the world of objective facts, that God has subjectivity, and that intersubjective knowledge comes through a union of subjectivity, then a subjective state shared with God, if possible, cannot be reduced to propositional content, either. Of course, this is a lot of ifs!

32 See note 17 above for more on why I prefer Stump's account over Benton's, which turns on the implausibility of the latter's principle of symmetry.

33 And not just narrative, but liturgy, as well as other rituals, but I leave these aside for now.

34 For more on divine ineffability in Islam, see Ahsan, 'Islamic Mystical Dialecticism'.

been participants, even just as bystanders, in the second-person experiences that the story describes. In the same way, [...] biblical narratives [...] constitute a way of sharing and passing on interpersonal experiences, including interpersonal experiences (whether real or imagined) with God, in all their messy richness. These narratively shared experiences can inform in subtle ways our intuitions and judgements, just as real-life experiences do.³⁵

If Stump is right about the transmission of second-person knowledge through narratives, God cannot be personally ineffable. Thus, even though one may not know any propositional facts about God (at least, no propositions that capture fundamental truths about God, those that might, so to speak, 'carve nature at its joints'),³⁶ one may still come to know God, personally. And indeed, one may come to know God well.

'Analytic Spirituality' and Personal Knowledge

This focus on what it might be to know God personally has come to characterise a strand of recent work in analytic theology, a strand that David Efrid has termed 'analytic spirituality'.³⁷ In his definitional piece, Efrid has used Talbert's description of what it is to know a person well to outline the conditions needed to (in his view) know God well. On this account, a person can come to know God well, if...

1. [They have] had a significant number of second-person face-to-face interactions with God, at least some of which have been relatively recent.
2. The contexts of those interactions were such as to permit God to reveal important aspects of himself, and God has done so.
3. God has not deceived [them] about himself in important respects.
4. [They have] succeeded in accurately perceiving what God has revealed, that is, [they are] not 'blinded' by her own biases or other impairments.³⁸

Of course, as Efrid has gone on to note, what such face-to-face encounters might amount to this side of the Beatific Vision is entirely open for question (indeed, Efrid has gone on to survey dyadic and triadic ways of

35 Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, p. 374.

36 See, for instance, Jacobs, 'The Ineffable, Inconceivable, Incomprehensible God', for more on this distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental truths.

37 See Efrid, 'Analytic Spirituality'.

38 Efrid, 'Analytic Spirituality', p. 444.

analysing participation in liturgy and group worship, prayer and reading of scripture, with each treated as a skill where through the skilful exercise thereof one might come to know God better). Minimally though, at least as I see it, if Stump's analysis of the transmission of personal knowledge through narrative withstands Benton's concerns about symmetry in personal knowledge (as I think it does), a reasonable case can be made that one might encounter God, as if face-to-face, through a specific way of reading scriptural narratives, where one imagines oneself within the reported second-person encounter. God, by widespread agreement between theists, is omnipotent and omniscient. Granting this and also the fact that, according to the Christian tradition that has been my focus, God is omnipresent, able to reveal his mind and to share significant personal presence with those willing and able to reciprocate, as well as omnibenevolent, willing to make himself available to others, such face-to-face analogues seem at least possible.

Analytic spirituality is of course limited in what it can say about the content of second-person knowledge, but insofar as propositionally irreducible second-person knowledge of persons is possible, future work in analytic spirituality might helpfully trace both how such knowledge might be achieved and the effects that such divine personal knowledge might have on a person.³⁹

Possibilities for Islamic Analytic Theology

How might a distinctively Islamic analytic theology attend to what Efrid has called 'analytic spirituality'? I can think of several fertile avenues for engagement.

Stump's distinction between Franciscan knowledge and Dominican knowledge has been used to address a tension between divine transcendence and divine immanence in the Christian tradition, both to show how an ineffable God can be known,⁴⁰ and also how one might come to know a hidden God.⁴¹ These problems of ineffability and hiddenness are present in Islamic analytic theology, too.⁴² Of course, just because there are similar

39 For more on Franciscan knowledge and divine action, see Efrid and Worsley, 'Divine Action and Operative Grace'.

40 See, for example, Efrid and Worsley, 'What can an Apophaticist Know?'

41 See, for instance, Dobrzeniecki, 'The Hidden God, Second Person Knowledge and the Incarnation'. With this distinction in hand, a person might not have the propositional belief that God exists and yet still know God, personally. If God is more interested in the latter than the former, this would go some way to undermine Schellenberg's argument from non-resistant non-belief.

42 See, for example, Ahsan, 'Resolving the Paradox of God's Unknowability and Ineffability'.

problems, one should not assume responses will be similar, too. Often (but not always), the idea of the incarnation, which is obviously unacceptable in Islam, is used as the means by which a person can come to personal knowledge of God.⁴³ It is certainly easier to see how one might know God personally, if God has assumed a human nature, than it is to see how one might come to know an ineffable God that resists any form of anthropomorphic analysis.

Even so, there remains a salient point of contact. It is the Word of God that becomes incarnate in the Christian tradition, and it is through the Word's assumption of a human nature, in Christ, that God is revealed to humanity. In the Islamic tradition, the Word of God is also the vehicle by which God expresses himself, but rather than as a person, the uncreated Word of God, the divine attribute of speech, is 'inlibrated' in the form of a book, the Qur'an.⁴⁴

To read, listen, or recite any verse of the Qur'an therefore is to encounter God through God's direct speech. This certainly seems to meet Efrd's first condition for getting to know God well. As for Efrd's second condition, this would be fulfilled if the Qur'an can and does reveal the divine nature in some way. If encountering the Word of God accurately reveals the fullness of the divine nature in the Christian tradition, to the extent that the Qur'an accurately reveals the divine nature, similar reasoning ought to apply. Certainly, as direct divine speech, the Qur'an will reveal what God intends it to reveal. With this, the extent to which Efrd's second condition can be met will be contingent, I think, on the much-contested relationship that holds between the divine attribute of speech and the divine essence in light of His unicity (which I will not enter into further here), and on whether God's mercy includes a desire for union with His creation (assuming this to be possible), in addition to a desire for their good.⁴⁵

One way, then, to have a second-person encounter with God is simply by reading, listening, or reciting the Qur'an. But such a divine audience alone, even if entered into with all reverence, is still insufficient to secure the second-personal knowledge that allows one to know God personally. Recall that second-person experience might also secure another kind of qualitative non-propositional knowledge, knowledge by acquaintance ('first-personal knowledge'). As discussed above, such acquaintance

43 See, for instance, Dobrzeniecki, 'The Hidden God, Second Person Knowledge and the Incarnation'.

44 For more on this comparison, see, for example, Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, pp. 191–221.

45 If God does not desire union with His creation, unless personal knowledge of God happens to be the greatest good for a person, there is no further reason to think God would intend to reveal Himself in this way.

knowledge remains insufficient for knowing somebody personally. Efir's fourth condition requires not just that we have a second-person encounter, and not just that the one we encounter in fact reveals something truly of themselves to us, but that we accurately perceive what the other is revealing of themselves in this encounter. Thus, even granting that the very words of the Qur'an reveal God personally, the way in which they so reveal God must be understood by those who share this audience, at least to a limited degree.

Although understanding can come through an analysis of speech at word and phrase level, it will best lead to personal knowledge of the speaker if it can be situated in a broader context (at the very least, such that one understands that these are the words of God, and that they are spoken to be understood, because the speaker believes it is important that you understand them).⁴⁶ Given the belief that the Qur'an is direct divine speech, I recognise attempting to reduce it to a simple narrative (or even a series of simple narratives) comes with a risk.⁴⁷ Nevertheless it could be that the very attempt to wrestle understanding from the Qur'an also offers the opportunity for the sort of second-person encounter that Efir has thought might mediate the revelation of divine second-person knowledge.⁴⁸ In any case, I take it that such wrestling is exemplified in Ramon Harvey's project in his *The Qur'an and the Just Society*. Outlining his vision for the moral narrative of the Qur'an, Harvey has written:

In God's wisdom all things begin and so shall they end. This is the idea that animates this reflection upon the story that the Qur'an tells from the primordial beginning of human existence to its infinite future. Unlike the Bible, in which the historical unfolding of God's covenant with humanity is traced through the linear order

46 In the Christian and Jewish traditions, this broader context is provided by the Biblical narrative.

47 For example, Dastmalchian has written: 'The style of the Qur'an in some ways resembles poetry and in some ways resembles prose and is commonly described as being neither poetry nor prose. One similarity with poetry that is important for a reading approaching the Qur'an for the first time to note is how the Qur'an is not a book with a continuous narrative from beginning to end. Rather, as with the poems in a poetry book, the chapters of the Qur'an do not lead directly from each other and are not overtly connected with each other. Indeed, even within a single chapter of the Qur'an the theme may change a number of times [...] The nature of the Qur'an is such that to have a comprehensive understanding of its teaching on [a particular topic] different verses must be pieced together from different parts of the text [...] To attempt to represent the teaching of the Qur'an in a narrative may be seen as an act of vandalism, akin to reducing a Shakespearean play to a script for a five minute children's cartoon ...'; Dastmalchian, 'Islam', pp. 154–55.

48 See, for instance, Worsley, 'Experiencing the Word of God'.

of the text, the Qur'an's moral narrative must be reconstructed from passages dispersed throughout its pages. In one sense this reflects more general principles of Qur'anic structure; in another, it accords with the attention it pays to the metaphysical patterns of the wider human condition, rather than the history of particular peoples. God's wisdom is the constant that informs His creation of the world, just as it underlies both His justice and mercy in the Hereafter.⁴⁹

Plausibly, or so it seems to me, sustained reflection on this moral narrative could allow for the same transmission of personal knowledge as Stump has suggested was possible with Biblical narratives, only, insofar as a particularly careful reconstruction is called for in drawing out such a moral narrative, a much more intimate engagement with the Qur'an is required than might be the case with one's engagement with Biblical narratives.

Alongside narrative engagement with a particular text, there is of course narrativel engagement with our own lives, particularly in the context of our own suffering. Here, the possibility of second-person knowledge can be put to work in theodicy. Indeed, in Stump's own attempt to respond to the evidential problem of suffering, suffering is treated both as a mode of and an occasion for a second-person experience of God. As one turns to God in anger, or frustration, or hopelessness, one comes to know God in a way one would not have achieved without this suffering.⁵⁰ Insofar as personal knowledge is an ingredient of union with God, and insofar as union with God is the greatest good for a person, the possibility of growth in personal knowledge (with a corresponding strengthening of one's union with God) can provide a benefit that serves as a morally sufficient reason for each and every instance of suffering. Given that personal knowledge requires second-person encounter, with the more profound the encounter, the greater the degree of knowledge, it would be interesting to see work contrasting Stump's approach to theodicy, centred as it is around non-propositional knowledge of God, with analytic analysis of the Beatific Vision in Islam (*ru'yat Allāh*).

Finally, as Efird has done with Christian spiritual practices, there are opportunities for analysing the possibility and scope of personal knowledge of God through Islamic spiritual practices (including mystical religious practices), by comparing the concepts of Franciscan knowledge of persons with, for example, existing categories of mystical experiential

49 Harvey, *The Qur'an and the Just Society*, p. 9.

50 For more on this, see Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*.

knowledge (*ma'rifa*),⁵¹ or by using the category of Franciscan knowledge to analyse the possibility, scope of and growth in divine intimacy.⁵²

Conclusion

In sum, having shown how analytic spirituality has developed in recent Christian analytic theology and assessing the challenges attendant to the idea of second-person knowledge of God, it seems to me that there is broad scope for Islamic analytic theologians to attend to an Islamic analytic spirituality, or, at the very least, interesting avenues to pursue in showing why Islamic analytic spirituality might prove a dead end. The above musings are obviously only very tentative gestures, at best a limited scaffolding for future work. It will be for others to build out the details. Nevertheless, I very much hope to engage with future constructive work in Islamic analytic spirituality.

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51 For instance, Shah-Kazemi, 'The Notional and Significance of *Ma'rifa* in Sufism'; Kays, *Unsayings God*.

52 Here, one might interpret Qur'anic verses such as Q. 2:186, 6:162, 50:16 and 57:4 as evidence of at least the possibility of significant divine personal presence, one of the ingredients Stump has thought that, when attended to appropriately, might mediate Franciscan knowledge of persons.

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PART IV

Contemporary Debates on the Basicity of Islamic and Christian Belief

CHAPTER 10

Fiṭra *Foundationalism*

Jamie B. Turner

Introduction

This chapter aims to develop and defend a foundationalist epistemology inspired by the eighth/fourteenth-century Damascene theologian Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). In doing so, it outlines a broadly faculty-based normative epistemology and a non-inferentialist religious epistemology, both of which are drawn from Ibn Taymiyya's concept of *fiṭra* (natural constitution). The Taymiyyan epistemology that is developed herein is positioned as an alternative to the classical model of foundationalism and, in some sense, as an alternative to a broadly *kalām*-based religious epistemology. The chapter begins with a consideration of foundationalism and its connection to religious epistemology in general. Then, a Taymiyyan normative epistemology is developed, and a Taymiyyan religious epistemology is outlined. Finally, both the normative and religious epistemologies drawn out from Ibn Taymiyya's thought are defended against some key objections.

Foundationalism

Foundationalism is a view in epistemology concerning the structure of knowledge or justified beliefs.¹ The structure of knowledge or justified beliefs is sometimes referred to as a 'noetic structure'.² According to foundationalism, indispensable to a proper noetic structure are certain foundations that form the fundamental grounds upon which one's knowledge or justified beliefs about the world are built. These foundations are certain propositions that a subject holds and that can have positive epistemic status (for instance, knowledge, justification), without being based on any

1 Poston, 'Foundationalism'.

2 Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', pp. 48–49.

other propositions that the subject holds. These foundations are typically referred to as 'basic beliefs'. If these basic beliefs are such that a given subject does indeed know or justifiedly believe them, then they are referred to as 'properly basic'. For example, suppose a subject *S* believes that *p*, where *p* = 'I feel pain' or 'I see a tree', then *S*'s belief that *p* will typically be properly basic for *S* (when certain conditions obtain). It is just these types of basic beliefs (namely, those that are 'properly basic') which are seen as appropriate as foundations for a proper noetic structure.

Those propositions which a subject believes that are 'non-foundational', in that they are based on or inferred from other beliefs that a subject believes, are 'based' beliefs. If *S*'s based beliefs are such that *S* does indeed know or justifiedly believe them, then we can refer to them as 'properly based'. That *S* possesses knowledge or justified belief with respect to a based belief, however, will ensue only when *S* knows or justifiedly believes a further proposition upon which that based belief depends. For example, suppose *S* forms the belief that *p*, where *p* = 'someone is at the door', which they inferred from a prior belief *p*^{*}, where *p*^{*} = 'I hear the doorbell ringing', we might think that *p* is an item of knowledge or justified belief for *S* and, hence, a properly based belief. But foundationalism upholds the idea that the chain of 'base relation' cannot continue *ad infinitum* and so must ultimately be grounded in properly basic beliefs.³

For simplicity's sake, let us refer to basic beliefs as 'non-inferential' and based beliefs as 'inferential', and let us restrict our focus to knowledge instead of treating both knowledge and justified belief (which are not necessarily identical).⁴ As *per* the above, then, foundationalism can be seen to uphold the following two theses:

FT₁ = there are some items of non-inferential knowledge.

FT₂ = inferential items of knowledge ultimately depend on non-inferential items of knowledge.

Many epistemologists have attempted to specify exactly which kinds of beliefs can be potential items of non-inferential knowledge and which beliefs, if known, must be inferred. A particularly prominent form of foundationalism is 'classical foundationalism' (CF). According to CF, the above foundationalist theses are to be modified in roughly the following way:

CFT₁ = there are some items of non-inferential knowledge: beliefs that are self-evident or incorrigible.

3 This idea forms the basis for the central argument for foundationalism, known as the 'regress argument'. See Poston, 'Foundationalism'.

4 Given that Muslim theologians traditionally concerned themselves with knowledge *simpliciter*, this is more appropriate for our purposes in this chapter.

CFT_2 = inferential items of knowledge ultimately depend on non-inferential items of knowledge – that is, self-evident, or incorrigible propositions: they are inferred from self-evident, or incorrigible propositions by means of x , where x = either deduction, induction, or abduction, accordingly.

Classical foundationalists are motivated by the concern that our foundational beliefs be epistemically certain. This is because epistemic justification is supposed to transfer from the foundations and ultimately ground our inferential beliefs, and insofar as epistemic certainty is achieved at the level of the foundations, the hope is that subsequent inferential beliefs will achieve a similar level of certainty when rooted in epistemically certain non-inferential beliefs. Hence, CFT_1 allows only those beliefs to act as foundational which are logically self-evident (for example, $2 + 2 = 4$) or are incorrigible in the sense that one cannot in principle be mistaken about them (for instance, ‘I feel pain’, ‘I see a tree’). Proponents of CF have differed with respect to CFT_2 , insofar as some propose that inferential beliefs must be logically deduced from non-inferential beliefs, while others have suggested that they may be inferred inductively or abductively.⁵

These days CF has far fewer defenders than it perhaps used to. Arguably, the major concern with CF is that it seems to imply a kind of implausible scepticism.⁶ For instance, it seems that many of the ordinary non-inferential beliefs of which we plausibly possess knowledge – such as that there are things in our immediate environment; that I did such and such yesterday; or that there exists other persons like myself – either lack sufficiently strong arguments to confer knowledge upon them, or are otherwise simply not based on arguments at all. In particular, young children or animals do not seem to ground such beliefs on arguments. If so, then CF seems to do away with what Ernest Sosa has termed ‘animal knowledge’ (that is, immediate knowledge absent any reflective understanding),⁷ and this seems implausible to many contemporary epistemologists.

Foundationalism and Religious Epistemology

Foundationalism *simpliciter*, CF and CF’s potential demise have significant bearing on religious epistemology.⁸ Consider that, if theses FT_1 and FT_2

5 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 84.

6 Indeed, Ali Hasan and Richard Fumerton, contemporary proponents of CF, have stated that ‘at least many philosophers are convinced that acceptance of classical foundationalism leads inevitably to an unacceptably radical scepticism’. Hasan and Fumerton, ‘Foundationalist Theories of Epistemic Justification’.

7 Sosa, ‘Knowledge and Intellectual Virtue’, p. 241.

8 Bergmann, ‘Foundationalism’, pp. 264–65.

are true, then a question arises as to whether theistic belief (namely, 'that God exists') can be among our foundational beliefs and hence known non-inferentially. Significantly, if one modifies those basic foundational theses to CF₁ and CF₂, then suddenly the answer becomes clear: theistic belief cannot be known non-inferentially because it is neither incorrigible nor self-evident. Therefore, if we are to have any knowledge of God's existence, we need to infer His existence from other beliefs which we know non-inferentially. This is particularly relevant to the concerns of this chapter because prominent approaches to religious epistemology within the Islamic tradition from a broadly *kalām* perspective arguably adopted variants of CF; hence, *kalām* theologians sought to offer arguments for God's existence to secure theistic belief with positive epistemic status.⁹

However, as noted above, perhaps one might think that one has good reason to reject CF. In this case, it means that we will have suddenly lost our basis for discriminating between what sort of belief gets into the foundations and what does not. This raises a key question then for theistic belief: if CF is false, on what basis do we now say that theistic belief cannot be an item of non-inferential knowledge for a given theist? Perhaps CF₁ and CF₂ will be rejected in favour of some other modified versions of FT₁ and FT₂. The nature of a new version of those theses may well have important implications for religious epistemology, because they may suggest that theistic belief can be an item of non-inferential knowledge after all.

In the remainder of this chapter, an alternative foundationalist epistemology will be defended in contrast to CF, which opens space for a unique form of Islamic religious epistemology that stands outside of the *kalām* tradition. This alternative will be drawn from the thought of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), offering both a distinctive model of foundationalism and an approach to contemporary religious epistemology in the Islamic milieu.

Taymiyyan Epistemology

In order to defend the alternative foundationalist epistemology I have in mind, it is imperative to begin with a discussion of Ibn Taymiyya's general epistemological framework, which will then be taken as inspiration in developing a kind of contemporary Taymiyyan epistemology. Ibn Taymiyya's epistemology has sometimes been described as empiricist,¹⁰ and this largely seems accurate. Indeed, for Ibn Taymiyya there are three primary sources of knowledge: sense perception (*ḥiss*), reason (*ʿaql*) and testimony (*khābar*).¹¹ Sense perception is the most fundamental, as it grasps the

9 Doko and Turner, 'Islamic Religious Epistemology', pp. 148–56.

10 Heer, 'Ibn Taymiyyah's Empiricism', pp. 109–15.

11 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar ta'arūḍ al-ʿaql wa-l-naql* (hereafter *Dar*), vol. 7, p. 324.

particulars that reason requires to do its work of abstraction and inference, and is superior to testimony in the directness of its grasping of these particulars.¹² At the focal point of Ibn Taymiyya's epistemology, however, is a concept referred to simply as *fiṭra*.¹³

To begin with, it ought to be noted that the concept of *fiṭra* is not unique to Ibn Taymiyya; rather, it finds its basis in the primary sources of Islam. In the Qur'an, we read in Q. 30:30: 'So [O Prophet] as a man of pure faith, stand firm and true in your devotion to the religion. This is the natural disposition that God instilled in mankind (*fiṭrat Allāhi allatī faṭara al-nāsa 'alayhā*)'. This Qur'anic verse highlights that *fiṭra* refers to a sort of natural and original constitution upon which God created all of humanity, and hence it denotes something intrinsic to the very make-up of all human beings. In Ibn Taymiyya's understanding, '*fiṭra* is the original nature of humans, uncorrupted by later beliefs and practices, prepared to accept the true notions of Islam'.¹⁴ The concept of *fiṭra*, then, arrives with religious epistemological connotation, for as Ibn Taymiyya suggests, it acts in some sense as a potency (*quwwa*) that urges human beings toward the recognition and worship of God.¹⁵

Carl Sharif El-Tobgui, in writing on Ibn Taymiyya's understanding of *fiṭra*, has suggested that the concept is 'perhaps best rendered as by the term "original normative disposition"'.¹⁶ He has suggested that this 'strong sense of normativity is both moral and cognitive [that is, epistemic]'.¹⁷ Mehmet Sait Özervarlı has written that *fiṭra* constitutes the 'original and distinctive qualities [of humans] that would direct activities if left unaffected by his or her family or social environment'.¹⁸ Taken together, then, these interpretations seem to imply that, for Ibn Taymiyya, *fiṭra* refers to an original disposition of humans with a normative component pertaining to how a human being ought to function at the moral and epistemic level, and how they may be affected by one's social milieu. Although the term 'disposition' is appropriate, when focusing specifically on the epistemological aspect of Ibn Taymiyya's thought, I think it is perhaps more apt to think of *fiṭra* as the natural 'constitution' of humans, as opposed to their disposition, as we shall see below.

12 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar*, vol. 7, p. 324.

13 El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation*, pp. 260–64.

14 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad b. Taymiyya* (hereafter *MF*), vol. 4, pp. 245–46. By Islam, here, Ibn Taymiyya states that he simply means the notion that 'there is none worthy of worship except the one God' (*Majmū' Fatāwā*, vol. 4, p. 246).

15 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar*, vol. 8, p. 458.

16 El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation*, p. 260.

17 El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation*, p. 260.

18 Özervarlı, 'Divine Wisdom, Human Agency and the Fitra in Ibn Taymiyya's Islamic Thought', p. 47.

According to Ibn Taymiyya, this natural constitution – upon which all human beings have been fashioned – constitutes the basis for the possibility of their cognition, comprehension and understanding:

[God] made the *fiṭra* of His servants disposed to the apprehension and understanding of the realities [of things] and to know them. And if it were not for this readiness within the hearts/minds (*qalb*) to know the truth, neither speculative reasoning would be possible, nor demonstration, discourse or language.¹⁹

Fiṭra, then, is central to the ability of human beings to understand the world and, hence, holds a crucial epistemic role for human cognition. Indeed, according to Ibn Taymiyya, it is apparently in virtue of *fiṭra* that a human's 'knowledge of truth [. . .] and the recognition of falsehood' is grounded,²⁰ and that *fiṭra* is what naturally orients humans towards the acquisition of knowledge: 'Children are born with sound *fiṭra*, which if left sound and intact, will make them choose knowledge over its denial'.²¹ It is also apparently by *fiṭra* that a person will necessarily follow and love what is true.²²

Thus, for Ibn Taymiyya, *fiṭra* somehow plays an integral role in the acquisition of knowledge. But in what sense does it occupy this role? To begin with, consider that, if God created humans upon a natural constitution (*fiṭra*) as *per* Ibn Taymiyya's supposition, then it is reasonable to think of God as having designed human beings in such a way that they have a shared nature and that this shared nature will pertain, at least in part, to the shared cognitive equipment or faculties that humans possess.²³ These cognitive faculties – such as reason, sense perception, memory, introspection and intuition – will be part of our shared constitution and will have been designed by God in a certain way so as to enable us to acquire knowledge. Indeed, it does seem to be the case that we do have certain shared cognitive faculties just by virtue of being humans, which are primed to deliver specific types of information to us. These cognitive faculties also appear to have specified functions, including certain capacities and limitations. For instance, our perceptual faculties can give us information about things in our immediate environment but not necessarily about things in the far distance; our memory can inform us about what happened very recently but not necessarily a long time ago, except in certain cases.

19 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, vol. 5, p. 62.

20 Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Intiṣār li-ahl al-athar (Naqd al-mantiq)*, p. 49.

21 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, vol. 8, p. 385.

22 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 15, p. 240.

23 Although Ibn Taymiyya supposes that God created us upon *fiṭra*, one need not assume a theistic explanation of the origins of our human cognitive constitution to agree with the normative epistemological theory outlined below.

An important point to consider here is that our human constitution or nature, in some sense, shapes the cognitive abilities we possess and, more importantly, dictates their intended function. To see this, consider the following analogy: just as a machine has components that are supposed to function in certain ways according to the nature of the machine, human beings have cognitive components that are supposed to function according to their nature. In other words, just as the overall ‘nature’ of a car, say, in some sense determines its specific parts and their capacities, our human constitution or nature determines our cognitive parts and their capacities, too. In this sense, we can think of our human constitution (namely, *fiṭra*), to borrow Alvin Plantinga’s phraseology as ‘the design plan for human beings’.²⁴ That is to say, our shared cognitive nature constitutes the overall ‘design plan’ (that is, the blueprint and specifications of our nature) for us as humans, just as the fundamental ‘nature’ of a car constitutes the overall ‘design plan’ of that machine. When thought of in this fashion, we can think of *fiṭra* – at least from an epistemological standpoint – as our ‘human cognitive constitution’; in being a kind of overall or general ‘design plan’ for us as humans, it determines or specifies the particular ‘design plans’ of our cognitive faculties. Ibn Taymiyya himself speaks of ‘the heart/mind (*qalb*)’, by its very *fiṭra*’ as being aware of something,²⁵ implying that our cognition is manifest in different capacities and has a certain nature or design plan. Interestingly, almost parallel to the Qur’anic verse quoted above (Q. 30:30), Ibn Taymiyya refers to ‘the intellects of mankind upon which God fashioned them (*‘uqūl banī Ādam allatī faṭarahum Allāh ‘alayhā*)’.²⁶ When taken together with the Qur’anic verse that this statement is evidently referencing, it suggests that in Ibn Taymiyya’s view God fashioned human beings upon a certain nature, which includes the specific nature of cognition.

The above analysis suggests that because we have a specific cognitive constitution as humans, our cognitive faculties will operate in a certain way given our cognitive nature. For Ibn Taymiyya, central to the operation of our faculties as grounded in *fiṭra* is their ability to connect us to truth.²⁷ As Ibn Taymiyya puts it, our ‘hearts (or minds; *qulūb*) have been fashioned (*maftūra*) such that [certain] realities (*ḥaqā’iq*) become evident to them, which they have a capacity to receive’.²⁸ In other words, our cognitive nature with its specific capacities or faculties is intrinsically geared toward acquiring true beliefs and knowledge. From a Taymiyyan perspective, we

24 Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 13.

25 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 2, p. 10.

26 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar*, vol. 7, p. 38.

27 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 4, p. 245.

28 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar*, vol. 8, p. 41.

can think of this in terms of God as the Fashioner (*al-Fāṭir*) having fashioned (*maftūra*) or designed our cognitive faculties according to a certain design plan which specifies its capacities and limitations, as stipulated by *fiṭra* (i.e. our overarching cognitive nature or design plan).

Fiṭra-based Normative Epistemology

We are now better positioned to consider what the concept of *fiṭra* implies for an account of normative epistemology and, hence, the role it plays in the acquisition of knowledge. As *per* our analysis of *fiṭra* above, two key epistemic ideas appear to emerge: (a) the idea of properly functioning cognition, and (b) the idea of cognition being truth-aimed. Consider that, as we have said, *fiṭra* specifies the design plan for each individual cognitive faculty in the sort of way that the ‘nature’ of a machine specifies the design plan of its relevant components. This means that the way in which our cognitive faculties ought to function when working well is determined by our overall cognitive nature. If our faculties are set up according to *fiṭra*, then this suggests that there is a way in which our cognitive faculties function properly and a way in which they malfunction. Let us say that for a cognitive faculty to function properly is just for it to operate according to its design plan, as determined by *fiṭra*. Additionally, however, *fiṭra* also grounds the *alethic* capacity of our faculties (namely, their ability to connect us to truth). In other words, it determines the sort of true beliefs that our cognitive faculties are primed to acquire, when they are functioning properly. A *fiṭra*-based epistemology seems to imply, at least initially, that the acquisition of knowledge relates to our natural cognitive faculties functioning properly and being appropriately oriented toward truth. Let us develop this idea further by investigating the extent to which (a) and (b) might be necessary conditions for knowledge.

First, consider condition (a): that our faculties ought to be functioning properly as *per* their design plan. Suppose, for instance, based on a cognitive malfunction, that my faculties produce auditory hallucinations of windchimes chiming outside my front door and, hence, trigger those faculties to produce the belief that ‘it is windy outside’. Suppose also that this belief is true. It seems that, even if true, the belief that ‘it is windy outside’ could not be an item of knowledge for me. This is because the belief was a product of cognitive malfunction; it was produced by sensory faculties (for example, hearing) failing to work in accordance with their design plan. As a result, that the belief turns out to be true is just a matter of epistemic luck and not the consequence of faculties successfully securing a true belief for me. Thus, it is plausible to think that our cognitive faculties working properly is a necessary condition for knowledge.

Second, consider condition (b): that our faculties be truth-aimed. Suppose that the cognitive faculties underpinning the production of the belief that 'I am under threat', say, are not properly aimed at securing a true belief for me but are instead concerned with aiding my survival. In this case, even if the belief that 'I am under threat' is true, it surely cannot be an item of knowledge for me. This is because it was a matter of luck that I acquired this true belief, and knowledge precludes such luck. If our faculties are not sufficiently aimed at truth but instead survival or coping amid a cold and cruel world, say, then our beliefs, even when true, will be subject to epistemic luck. Therefore, that our cognitive faculties are truth-aimed is also plausibly a necessary condition for knowledge.

Roughly, then, *fiṭra*-based normative epistemology, as outlined thus far, suggests that knowledge is achieved when a subject holds a true belief that is the product of truth-aimed cognitive faculties functioning properly. We can put this in terms of three basic conditions:

1. *S* believes that *p*.
2. *p* is true.
3. *S*'s belief that *p* is produced by cognitive faculties operating as specified by *S*'s cognitive constitution (*fiṭra*).

The conditions captured in (1) – (2) are straightforward enough: knowledge requires that *S* holds a true belief. In fact, (1) – (2) are implicit in (3). The idea captured in (3) is both a proper function condition (a) and a truth-aimed condition (b). From a Taymiyyan perspective, these conditions arise insofar as God is thought to have created humans upon *fiṭra* (that is, God endowed them with a certain nature) and *fiṭra* from an epistemological standpoint is thought to be our human cognitive constitution. In other words, *fiṭra* constitutes the overall design plan of our cognitive faculties; it stipulates how they ought to operate when functioning properly. Significantly, *fiṭra* also constitutes a design plan for our cognitive faculties with truth in mind, or as the target. Based on these conditions, then, we might think that we are now able to explain how ordinary beliefs may be items of knowledge for someone. For provided that *S*'s faculties are working as they ought and are truth-aimed, when *S* forms the belief that 'there is a tree in the back garden' or that 'I ate cereal for breakfast', such ordinary beliefs can be items of knowledge for *S*.

However, that would be too hasty. For even though (1) – (3) seem like necessary conditions for knowledge, they are not plausibly sufficient. A further necessary condition needs to be added:

4. *S*'s cognitive faculties are operating in an environment congenial for their operation, as stipulated by *S*'s cognitive constitution (*fiṭra*).

As alluded to earlier, Ibn Taymiyya does recognise that our environment can have a bearing on one's ability to acquire knowledge insofar as that environment may not be congenial for our faculties as specified by *fiṭra*.²⁹ Consider, for example, that even if all the parts of a brand-new Range Rover are working properly according to how they were designed, the car and its parts will not work well in thick snow or under water. Likewise, for instance, my perceptual faculties will not work well under conditions in which there is little light in a dark room. Nor will my whole cognitive apparatus work well under conditions in which there is little oxygen. It can also be the case that our environment 'tricks' our faculties in some sense. For instance, suppose I form the true belief that it is three o'clock based on looking at a nearby clock. If that clock is broken but just so happened to have remained on three, then I would fail to know that it is three o'clock. This is no fault of my cognitive faculties, but simply because the relevant object in my environment 'tricked' me, so to speak. Thus, it seems right to think that whether we possess knowledge depends on us being in environments congenial for the workings of our cognitive faculties.

Yet, even if we have a true belief that is the result of our cognitive faculties working properly in the right environments, we could still fail to possess knowledge if we have a *defeater* for our belief. We can state this condition as follows:

5. *S* has no defeater for her belief that *p*.

By a defeater, here, we mean a reason that *S* acquires to give up their belief that *p*. A defeater can either be a reason that tells directly against the truth of *p* (i.e. a rebutting defeater), or against *S*'s basis for believing that *p* (i.e. an undercutting defeater).³⁰ What is crucial to note is that defeaters will in some sense be connected to the design plan of our cognitive faculties, as specified by *fiṭra*. When, for instance, something appears to us in a certain way, say as a 'tree' or as 'red', our cognitive faculties – if working well in the right environments – will enable us to form the appropriate belief that we see a tree or something red. Hence, our faculties have specifications concerning when to produce an appropriate belief in the right circumstances, but this will also mean precluding the formation of inappropriate beliefs in those circumstances. For example, there would evidently be something untoward if our faculties produced the belief that we see a squirrel when something appears to us as a 'tree', say. Significantly, defeaters constitute part of the circumstances surrounding appropriate belief formation. What this means is that our cognitive faculties are specified in such a

29 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 4, p. 247; *Dar'*, vol. 3, p. 317.

30 For more on the concept of 'defeaters', see Sudduth, 'Defeaters in Epistemology'.

way that when certain new information as input is acquired, the doxastic output of our faculties will be reconfigured in light of this new information.

For instance, suppose you believe that you have put sugar in your tea because the relevant container had ‘sugar’ written on it. Then suppose you come to taste a bitter saltiness in your tea upon drinking. In this case – if your faculties are working well – you will reconfigure your doxastic output by coming to believe that it was, in fact, salt that you had put in the tea. This doxastic reconfiguration is stipulated by the design plan of your cognitive faculties, such that the new information acquired as input triggers the production of a new belief and an abandonment of a prior belief. If, however, our cognitive faculties continue to form a belief that *p* amid some new defeating information *D*, then those faculties have malfunctioned. Hence, the design plan of our faculties outlining specifications for proper function includes circumstances in which one acquires a defeater.

Ibn Taymiyya himself entertains the concept of a ‘rational counter-objection’ (*al-mu‘ārid al-‘aqlī*),³¹ which typically refers to a rational argument that undermines the truth of a belief, although we may think of it more generally as some apparent rational basis to reject a belief. He suggests that – at least in principle – rational counter-objections can undermine one’s beliefs.³² Thus, we might think that the no-defeater condition fits in comfortably with a *fiṭra*-based epistemology and, hence, unproblematically include it. Having said that, we need not add this as a fifth condition to the set (1) – (4), because it is covered by condition (3), insofar as (3) states that the belief that *p* be formed by proper functioning faculties. As we have seen, this includes circumstances in which we acquire a defeater. Therefore, we might finally outline the necessary and, when taken together, sufficient conditions for knowledge according to Taymiyyan *fiṭra*-based epistemology as follows:

1. *S* believes that *p*.
2. *p* is true.
3. *S*’s belief that *p* is produced by cognitive faculties operating as specified by *S*’s cognitive constitution (*fiṭra*).
4. *S*’s cognitive faculties are operating in an environment congenial for their operation, as stipulated by *S*’s cognitive constitution (*fiṭra*).

With this account now stated in full, let us consider how it looks when applied to a real example. Suppose one sees a cup on one’s desk or hears an oncoming car, the relevant perceptual faculties – when working well in the right environment and primed to give one accurate information as specified

31 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar’*, vol. 5, p. 335.

32 El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation*, pp. 164–68.

by *fiṭra* – should and typically will produce an experience in the subject that in some sense ‘mirrors’ the relevant features of one’s external environment (i.e. the cup or the sound of the car). In this way, perceptual faculties are occasioned by the sensory input received from the external object, which produces an experience within a subject and thence triggers the production of an appropriate corresponding belief (i.e. that ‘there is a cup’; that ‘there is an oncoming car’). As such, when our cognitive faculties are working as they ought in congenial environments, aimed at true belief and absent any defeaters, they will produce relevant experiences within a subject triggering an appropriate belief, grounded in their proper operation as specified by *fiṭra*. Consequently, the subject will possess knowledge with respect to their appropriately formed belief.

***Fiṭra* Foundationalism**

The above account of Taymiyyan *fiṭra*-based normative epistemology has quite clear ramifications for a model of foundationalism. To begin with, consider the following passage from Ibn Taymiyya where he seems to affirm something like foundationalism *simpliciter*:

The proof which leads to knowledge through discursive reasoning (*bi-l-naẓar*) must be one that goes back to non-inferential immediately known propositions (*muqaddimāt ʿdarūrīyya fiṭrīyya*). For all knowledge that is not known non-inferentially (*ʿdarūrī*) must go [back] to non-inferential knowledge (*ʿdarūrī*). For if rationally inferred propositions are always established by other rationally inferred propositions, it will lead to circularity or to an infinite regress.³³

Here Ibn Taymiyya suggests that ultimately all our inferential knowledge must rest on propositions that we know non-inferentially. For if we do not have non-inferential knowledge at the foundations of our noetic structure, it will either lead to a form of circularity (i.e. epistemic coher-entism) or an infinite regress in which all our propositional knowledge is inferred from other propositions *ad infinitum* (i.e. epistemic infinitism). Ibn Taymiyya regards these latter options as implausible and so puts it that ‘there must be intuitive primordial knowledge, which God initiates in [one’s] heart [or mind (*qalb*)], and the aim of all proofs is to go back to it’.³⁴

33 Ibn Taymiyya, *Darʿ*, vol. 3, p. 309. Also see Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 4, p. 43, where he makes the point that premises known non-inferentially do not require evidence – in the sense of an argument – in support of them (*lā taḥtāj ilā dalīl*).

34 Ibn Taymiyya, *Darʿ*, vol. 3, p. 309.

As such, we can plausibly interpret Ibn Taymiyya here as upholding the two basic foundationalist theses stated earlier:

FT₁ = there are some items of non-inferential knowledge.

FT₂ = inferential items of knowledge ultimately depend on non-inferential items of knowledge.

Ibn Taymiyya clearly affirms these two basic theses. First, he recognises and upholds the idea that we have non-inferential knowledge (*‘ilm ḍarūrī*). He regards such knowledge as being enjoined to a creature by a necessity that one cannot relinquish (i.e. it is doxastically involuntary) and is thus regarded as being rooted in a creature’s nature (*yalzam nafs al-makhlūq*).³⁵ He conceives of such knowledge as not being dependent on argumentation and as the foundation of our noetic structure.³⁶ Yet, second, he also recognises that we have inferential knowledge (*‘ilm al-naẓarī al-kasbī*).³⁷ As *per* the above, he evidently thinks that inferential knowledge ultimately rests on non-inferential knowledge. It is also crucial to note that Ibn Taymiyya regards non-inferential knowledge as being in some sense inextricably linked to *fiṭra*. This is particularly evident in his usage of the combined terms of *ḍarūriyya fiṭriyya* or *fiṭrī-ḍarūrī*.³⁸ By this he seems to mean non-inferential knowledge, which is intuitive, instinctual, natural, or simply grounded in *fiṭra*. Perhaps we can understand this by saying that non-inferential items of knowledge are ‘default’ products of our cognitive nature.

In centring his epistemology on *fiṭra*, Ibn Taymiyya opens the possibility for a broader and more moderate version of foundationalism in contrast to classical foundationalism.³⁹ This is because what makes it into the foundations of a proper noetic structure are simply those beliefs that are ‘default’ products of our natural cognitive faculties. As such, Ibn Taymiyya regards numerous beliefs we hold as potential items of non-inferential knowledge beyond merely those that are self-evident or incorrigible. Indeed, he regards the products of sense perception as non-inferential knowledge (*ḍarūra ḥissiyya*).⁴⁰ However, by this he means both the ‘external’ perception of things in our immediate environment (*al-ḥiss al-ẓāhir*) and the ‘internal’ perception (or rather introspection) of things about

35 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 4, p. 44.

36 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar’*, vol. 3, p. 317.

37 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar’*, vol. 4, p. 43.

38 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar’*, vol. 3, p. 120.

39 One might say in contrast to the ‘classical foundationalism’ of his Muslim interlocutors in the *kalām* tradition.

40 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar’*, vol. 3, p. 317.

our own mental life (*al-ḥiss al-bāṭin*).⁴¹ The latter clearly belongs to the category of incorrigible beliefs in the classical foundationalist scheme. Yet, the former does not necessarily equate to incorrigible beliefs about one's perceptual appearances (i.e. 'I see a tree') but rather concerns corrigible beliefs about things in external reality (i.e. 'there is a tree'). This already suggests a difference in approach toward which beliefs can be classified as foundational.

Ibn Taymiyya also admits self-evident beliefs as items of non-inferential knowledge (i.e. *al-badihiyyāt*). For example, that 'one is half of two',⁴² or that what is merely 'possible' (*mumkin*) is not also 'necessary' (*wājib*),⁴³ or beliefs concerning the truth of the 'law of non-contradiction' (*al-jam' bayna al-naqīḍayn*),⁴⁴ or the 'law of the excluded middle' (*raf' al-naqīḍayn*)⁴⁵ are all taken to be forms of non-inferential knowledge. But he also recognises beliefs beyond perceptual and self-evident types as potential items of non-inferential knowledge. For instance, he suggests that some broadly metaphysical beliefs can be known non-inferentially, such as that any temporally originated thing (*al-muḥḍath*) must have an originator (*muḥḍith*),⁴⁶ and even that an infinite regress of efficient causes (*tasalsul al-'ilal*) is impossible.⁴⁷ He also suggests that our *fiṭra* has within it a moral sense which enables us to have non-inferential knowledge of certain basic moral truths.⁴⁸ Ibn Taymiyya also upholds the idea that we have a kind of *sensus divinitatis* or *fiṭrī* theistic faculty or disposition as part of our natural cognitive equipment, which enables us to know God as our maker and creator in non-inferential fashion.⁴⁹ Finally, he suggests that certain types of testimonial belief could be known non-inferentially – particularly what is referred to as multiple or mass testimony (*khabar mutawātir*), on the basis that it is unreasonable to doubt, given that it has been reported so numerous.⁵⁰

It is evident then that Ibn Taymiyya's *fiṭra*-based epistemology allows for a broader version of foundationalism, in that what may be among the foundations is much broader than classical foundationalism. But a question remains as to the fundamental grounding of these foundational beliefs, as

41 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, vol. 7, p. 324; Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Radd 'alā al-mantiqiyyīn* (hereafter *Al-Radd*), pp. 52–53.

42 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 2, p. 15.

43 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, vol. 3, p. 99.

44 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, vol. 1, p. 289.

45 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar'*, vol. 3, p. 362.

46 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 1, p. 47.

47 Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-sunna*, vol. 1, pp. 436–38.

48 Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Radd*, p. 474.

49 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 6, p. 73.

50 Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Musawwada fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, p. 233.

well as the sense in which this model might be more moderate than classical foundationalism. To address the former question, the way in which the set of beliefs which Ibn Taymiyya regards as potential grounds for non-inferential knowledge become knowledge, can be explained in reference to the *fiṭra*-based normative epistemology outlined earlier. Thus, for instance, when our faculties of moral sense, rational intuition, perception or introspection are operating according to their design plan as stipulated by *fiṭra*, in the right sort of environments then those faculties will allow our non-inferential beliefs to count as knowledge. Hence, ultimately whether the beliefs are appraised with knowledge depends on the extent to which they are appropriate products of our natural cognitive faculties.

To address the latter question, the sense in which *Fiṭra* Foundationalism can be viewed as more moderate is that it allows potentially fallible beliefs among the foundations of our noetic structure. For instance, with respect to our perceptual beliefs we know that our perceptual faculties are fallible and, hence, sometimes mistaken. Indeed, Ibn Taymiyya himself acknowledges that, with respect to introspection or external sensory perception (*al-ḥiss al-bāṭin aw al-ẓāhir*) as well as reason (*ʿaql*), they may succumb to error (*ghalaṭ*).⁵¹ Yet, he regards them as nonetheless reliable or sound (*saḥḥa*) in general, because ‘God created His servants upon *fiṭra*’;⁵² in other words, our cognitive constitution makes our faculties truth-aimed in a general sense. Having said that, Ibn Taymiyya does sometimes refer to non-inferential knowledge as epistemically certain (*ḍarūrī yaqīnī*).⁵³ We can make sense of this, however, by simply saying that, although our faculties that deliver non-inferential knowledge, such as our perceptual faculties, are occasionally wrong, when working properly they deliver to us knowledge of the highest order or degree, which only a sceptic or sophist (*musafsiṭ*) would attempt to repudiate.⁵⁴ Yet, given that our faculties might succumb to error at least on occasion, one might ask on what basis we should trust them with confidence. For Ibn Taymiyya our natural cognitive faculties ought to be treated as *prima facie* trustworthy.⁵⁵ Thus, perhaps we can formulate the following sort of principle. Call it the ‘principle of epistemic trust’:

PET: the doxastic products of our natural cognitive faculties should be treated as epistemically trustworthy (innocent), unless and until one has reason (i.e. a defeater) to regard those products as untrustworthy (guilty).

51 Ibn Taymiyya, *Naqd*, p. 45.

52 Ibn Taymiyya, *Naqd*, p. 45.

53 Ibn Taymiyya, *Darʿ*, vol. 3, p. 317.

54 Ibn Taymiyya, *Darʿ*, vol. 3, p. 428.

55 El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation*, p. 271.

Roughly, PET means that one is epistemically entitled to uphold the non-inferential products produced by one's natural cognitive faculties (that is, 'basic beliefs'), unless one has a defeater for the relevant products. Thus, unless I have some defeater to think that I am not presently seeing a computer, I am epistemically entitled in believing that 'I am presently seeing a computer'. An important corollary of this principle in relation to *fiṭra*-based normative epistemology is the acknowledgement that, although it is evidently beyond our first-person purview to determine whether our cognitive faculties are working properly or aimed at truth (without relying on them and assuming this to be the case in order to check), this is the reality of our human condition: we must trust and rely on our natural cognitive faculties and treat them as reliable, unless we have reason to think otherwise.

In light of the above, then, we are now in a position to modify the first of the basic theses of foundationalism along the following Taymiyyan lines in an attempt to characterise *Fiṭra* Foundationalism:

FFT₁ = there are some items of non-inferential knowledge: beliefs that are immediate (default) products of our natural cognitive faculties, operating as specified by *fiṭra* in congenial environments.

The idea here then is that, provided that our natural cognitive faculties are operating as they ought in congenial environments, those beliefs which are non-inferential can be items of knowledge for a person. According to a Taymiyyan picture, it looks like each of the following beliefs could potentially be items of non-inferential knowledge, known according to the relevant corresponding faculties:

- There is a tree (perceptually).
- I am in pain (introspectively).
- I had cereal this morning (memorially).
- $1 + 1 = 2$ (intuitively).
- If $A = B$, and $B = C$, then $A = C$ (intuitively).
- My friend is going on holiday (testimonially).
- Torturing babies is wrong (morally).
- God exists (theistically).
- People besides me exist (agent-detectively).

Although some of the above might not have been mentioned explicitly by Ibn Taymiyya, it is implicit by virtue of a Taymiyyan notion that all our natural cognitive faculties (including things like memory and detecting human agents) can generate knowledge for us and may in principle be trusted (as *per* PET). But what about the second basic thesis of foundationalism, that

inferential items of knowledge depend on non-inferential items of knowledge? One might wonder, given that all our beliefs are products of our cognitive faculties, what makes one belief sufficient to be an item of non-inferential knowledge and another inferential knowledge?

What determines when a belief is appropriately known non-inferentially is when we have a relevant cognitive faculty geared up to give us that kind of knowledge. Hence, for instance, it seems reasonable to think that, when our perceptual faculties are working properly, they can give us knowledge of what is in our immediate environment. However, our perceptual or rational faculties, as *per* their design plan, do not have the capacity or scope to give us knowledge in a non-inferential manner as to who committed a certain crime or the specific state of the weather on a certain day in the distant future. In these cases, if we are not simply relying on testimony, we need to infer from bits of evidence or data as to the best explanation of who committed the crime or what the weather is going to be like. It seems implausible to think that we can just know in immediate fashion in these cases; we simply do not have the ability to know these things without some set of data which makes an inference possible. What matters, then, is the nature and capacity of our cognitive faculties. Therefore, we can state the second thesis of *Fitra* Foundationalism as follows:

FFT₂ = inferential items of knowledge ultimately depend on non-inferential items of knowledge, which are appropriately inferred true beliefs as dictated by the design plan of our natural cognitive faculties specified by *fitra*.

According to this thesis, the degree of evidential support required for an inferential belief to be an item of knowledge is not necessarily deductive, inductive, or abductive; rather, it is simply determined by the design plan of our cognitive faculties. Whether the evidential support that we have enables us to know by way of inference that X person committed the crime, or that the weather will be like such and such on X day, depends on whether our cognitive faculties are designed in a way such that we *should* believe that *p* based on the set of evidence *E* that we have available to us. As such, whether we can know something non-inferentially or inferentially depends on the cognitive faculties we have, given their design plan as specified by *fitra*.

Therefore, in combination with a *fitra*-based normative epistemology, Ibn Taymiyya's reflections on non-inferential and inferential knowledge enable us to outline a broader and more moderate alternative to classical foundationalism – namely, *Fitra* Foundationalism. Before turning to consider the implications of *Fitra* Foundationalism for religious epistemology, we ought to say something brief here as to why this account of foundationalism may well be preferable to classical versions. In the Introduction, we

noted the problem of scepticism that faces classical foundationalism. It is evident that this version of foundationalism faces no such problem. For it is not the case that a person needs by way of inference to prove to herself that her beliefs beyond those that are self-evident or incorrigible are true, but that, provided that her faculties are in proper working order, she can know that other minds exist, that she ate cereal for breakfast, that X is the case by way of testimony from parents and so forth. In other words, ‘animal knowledge’ is intact.

Taymiyyan Religious Epistemology

In a sense, the implications for religious epistemology, given a *Fiṭra* Foundationalist epistemology are straightforward. To begin with, as we noted earlier, for Ibn Taymiyya theistic belief can be known non-inferentially.⁵⁶ Indeed, he states quite clearly that ‘the affirmation of the Creator and His perfection is immediate (*fiṭriyya*) and non-inferential (*ḍarūriyya*) for one whose *fiṭra* remains intact’.⁵⁷ He also says elsewhere that ‘*fiṭra* has a capacity (*quwwa*) to know and believe in the creator’.⁵⁸ Hence, that our cognitive faculties as specified by *fiṭra* have a natural propensity to believe in God and an ability to know Him non-inferentially is clear. As stated above, what marks the difference between whether one can know something non-inferentially or inferentially is whether one has a certain capacity as *per* one’s cognitive nature to know something that way. Therefore, given that Ibn Taymiyya thinks that we do have such a special theistic capacity – akin to a kind of *sensus divinitatis* or what we might think of as a ‘*fiṭrī* theistic faculty’ – *fiṭra*-based epistemology regards theistic beliefs, such as ‘God exists’, as a potential item of non-inferential knowledge. But how exactly is this knowledge supposed to ensue?

The way in which Ibn Taymiyya conceives of human beings coming to non-inferential theistic knowledge is by a process that he coins *istidlāl bi-l-āyāt* (an inference through signs).⁵⁹ Roughly, it is the idea is that one can perceive God’s existence through theistic signs that God has embedded within the natural world.⁶⁰ Indeed, according to Ibn Taymiyya, ‘every created thing is a sign and an evidence of the Creator Himself’.⁶¹ That this is so is particularly evident given that everything other than God is contingent on Him in some sense: ‘everything else other than Him is evidence of His

56 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 16, p. 328.

57 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 6, p. 73.

58 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar*, vol. 8, p. 458.

59 Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Radd*, p. 193.

60 Cf. Hallaq, ‘Ibn Taymiyya on the existence of God’.

61 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 1, p. 48.

Self and signs of His existence [...] no contingent existent can be actualized without His very self being actual'.⁶² However, this 'inference' through signs is not to be conceived as an inference in the typical sense. It does not appear to work on the basis of premises. Indeed, this is what Ibn Taymiyya suggests when he explains that 'affirming one's knowledge of the Creator and prophecy does not depend on any syllogisms (*al-aqyisa*). Rather, this knowledge is attained from the signs (*āyāt*) that prove a specific matter. These matters are known non-inferentially (*bi-l-ilm al-ḍarūrī*), not requiring discursive reasoning (*naẓar*)'.⁶³ Therefore, the epistemic and cognitive process does not involve argumentation, and the theistic beliefs that are a consequence of such a process are duly non-inferential.

Elsewhere I have made mention of different ways in which we could understand the specific nature of this process.⁶⁴ Here I will just sketch one of those ways. According to Ibn Taymiyya, 'the signs of God are always known through sense perception'.⁶⁵ Thus, perhaps we might think that Ibn Taymiyya's thesis runs something close to what Del Ratzsch has argued for based on Thomas Reid's epistemology: that belief in a designer (God) from the apparent design (or beauty, contingency, and so on) in nature can be formed non-inferentially, akin to the way in which we form our ordinary perceptual beliefs. Following Reid, Ratzsch has suggested that some disposition to form these beliefs is integral to this outlook, or, as he has put it, 'built into our cognitive nature'.⁶⁶ Concerning Reid's view, Ratzsch has concluded that 'Reid must be read as holding the view that [...] recognition of a mark as a mark of design is perceptual'.⁶⁷ In drawing from Ratzsch, then, we might think that Ibn Taymiyya holds a similar position concerning our natural faculty primed to form theistic beliefs as *per fiṭra*, which results in an apprehension of theistic signs in nature mediated *via* our perceptual faculties.

Given the above, it is evident that we have a straightforward explanation as to how theistic belief might be known in a non-inferential way: if God exists – as Ibn Taymiyya supposes – then God created us with a natural faculty or disposition to know Him. As *per* a *fiṭra*-based epistemology, when this *fiṭrī* theistic disposition or faculty works as it ought in congenial environments, theistic belief can be an item of knowledge for someone. As a result, we can tentatively say that *S*'s theistic belief that *p* can be an item of non-inferential knowledge for *S* when the following conditions obtain:

62 Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Radd*, p. 197.

63 Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Radd*, p. 401.

64 Turner, 'Ibn Taymiyya on Signs and Knowledge of God', pp. 586–88.

65 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 2, p. 48.

66 Ratzsch, *Perceiving Design*, p. 129.

67 Ratzsch, *Perceiving Design*, p. 130.

that *S*'s theistic belief that *p* where *p* = 'God exists' is true, where *S*'s *fiṭrī* theistic faculty is appropriately triggered by experiences of theistic signs in nature, and where that faculty is working properly in congenial environments when producing in *S* the belief that *p*.

Theistic Knowledge and Favourable Environments

At this point, however, an important question naturally arises: why do many individuals fail to believe in God if we have a natural cognitive faculty akin to other faculties to know Him? This seems to be an important question because it raises suspicions as to whether we do indeed have such a faculty.⁶⁸ Earlier I outlined two important conditions on knowledge: a proper function condition and a congenial environment condition. Both conditions have particularly important bearing on the possibility of theistic knowledge for Ibn Taymiyya, because he regards *fiṭra* as being fashioned in such a way that our cognitive faculties inherent in *fiṭra* work well only in certain environments and that some environments can even act as a sort of impediment for the natural workings of our *fiṭrī* theistic faculty.

In following a famous prophetic tradition,⁶⁹ Ibn Taymiyya considers the idea that our *fiṭrī* theistic faculty may fail to work as it has been designed to function. He states that '*fiṭra* is to the truth as the light is to the sun; everyone who has eyes can see the sun if there are no veils over them'.⁷⁰ In other words, when *fiṭra* is unhindered, it will guide one's cognitive abilities toward truth. However, he continues by stating that the erroneous beliefs of certain religious traditions can act like veils preventing people from seeing the truth, especially religious truths, 'in a manner similar to a veil, which prevents one's sight from seeing the sun'.⁷¹ As such, *fiṭra* guides our faculties toward theistic knowledge only when 'nothing obstructs or prevents it'.⁷² But why think that the environment in which one is should have such an important bearing on whether we can acquire true theistic beliefs?

Consider again how our cognitive environments in general can impact our cognition. I noted above how, even if all the parts of a brand-new Range Rover are working properly according to how they were designed, the car and its parts will not work well in thick snow or under water. Likewise, my whole cognitive apparatus will not work well under conditions in which there is little oxygen such as at high altitude, or if I am in extreme

68 On the notion that findings in cognitive science of religion may support the thought that we do have such a faculty or disposition, see Clark and Barrett, 'Reformed Epistemology and the Cognitive Science of Religion'.

69 Cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6, p. 114.

70 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 4, p. 247.

71 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 4, p. 247.

72 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 4, p. 247.

heat, under water, in a zero-gravity state, or within a noise-polluted environment. In the cases of the car and the lack of oxygen, for instance, the environment is not only a hindrance because it is not congenial, but the environment prevents the proper functioning of the parts or faculties themselves. This is roughly the idea that Ibn Taymiyya seems to have in mind: an environment can prevent proper functioning. He seems to think that our *fiṭrī* theistic faculty or disposition only works well in certain cognitive environments. Bearing this in mind, then, we can make a distinction here between favourable cognitive environments and unfavourable cognitive environments. Roughly, the former refers to environments congenial to the proper workings of our cognitive faculties and their ability to acquire true beliefs, whereas the latter refers to environments that are not congenial in the same sense.

A given cognitive environment might be deemed unfavourable due to the problem of ‘epistemic pollution’.⁷³ By epistemic pollution, I mean the ‘polluting’ of the environment (or society) epistemically, by the widespread proliferation of false beliefs or unreliable epistemic practices facilitated through certain ‘epistemic pollutants’. For instance, imagine a community taught that beliefs differing from their own on any issue at all are not to be listened to, heard, read, or considered. This epistemic practice would be a kind of ‘epistemic pollutant’, less likely to enable community members to acquire true beliefs. Consider also social groups or communities in which wild conspiracies are widespread; dubious ‘academic journals’ which feign a respectable ‘expert’ status; regimes that are not transparent about their political activities; extreme secular societies that stifle any religious teaching or practice; and so forth. In each of these cases, either the spreading of false beliefs or non-truth-conducive epistemic policies are forms of epistemic pollutants that disseminate epistemic pollution within a cognitive environment. As a result, they inhibit our faculties to access truth.

What about specific cognitive environments in which one exercises their theistic faculty? As in non-religious domains, I think there will be unfavourable cognitive environments that contain ‘epistemic pollution’ not congenial for one’s *fiṭrī* theistic faculty. For instance, take the example of an extreme secular regime or society in which theistic beliefs are radically suppressed and where atheism is widespread. Perhaps a society like this, or secular societies in general, are awash with ‘defeaters’ for theistic belief. Indeed, as we pointed out earlier, Ibn Taymiyya thought that the erroneous beliefs of false religion act like veils over our *fiṭrī* theistic faculty, and atheistic belief is a paradigmatic false ‘religious belief’ in that it states that God does not even exist. Such societies might also be thought to proliferate ‘sin’, or ways of being that are contrary to godliness. Members of these

73 Levy, *Bad Beliefs*, pp. 110–31.

societies who may be taught by parents, teachers and peers to act in ways contrary to God's commands might facilitate a form of 'social sinfulness'. This, in turn, might erect a barrier between this cognitive environment and acquiring true beliefs about God, by standing at a distance from God and thus removing itself from His guidance.

In contrast, a more favourable cognitive environment will probably be one that consists of religious believers who profess belief in God and seek to engage their faith through forms of praxis directed at the worship of God. This community would probably be one in which true beliefs about God do proliferate through religious teaching from parents, to teachers, and others. It will also probably be one in which theistic belief is welcomed, encouraged, desirable, unhindered, expected, and where God is seen as a good. Such an environment will also be relatively free from the suppression of theistic belief, as well as defeaters to theism in the form of widespread atheism and objections or reasons to refrain from believing. In that sense, it may be relatively free of certain forms of sin that direct our attention away from God and the sacred. Yet, this cognitive environment might also consist of smaller and more local environments. This could be a local place of worship or a group of friends who are dedicated to cultivating a relationship with God. But it may even consist of morally upright and honest companions of differing worldviews that encourage a sincere seeking of the truth. This friendship group might require of one intellectual humility and openness in the search for divine truth. Sin often instils within us pride, and sin encourages believing only what we like, what pleases us or gives us a certain status. Thus, the humility nurtured in such a social environment can also be favourable for the proper workings of our theistic faculty, which requires a humility before God, as well as the relative absence of pride in the pursuit of divine truth.

Theistic Knowledge and Reliable Agency

However, there is also an important aspect as to why individuals fail to perceive God in non-inferential fashion, which relates to their own activity as epistemic agents. Consider again the case of the Range Rover and the proper functioning of its parts. Not only does the car need to be in the right environment to work well, but we as users of the car need to operate it competently or reliably for those parts and the vehicle as a whole to work well. Often, to acquire knowledge, not only do we need to be in favourable cognitive environments, but we also need to be good epistemic agents. Indeed, it does seem that the proper functioning of our cognitive faculties is often dependent on us having the right epistemic virtues and avoiding certain epistemic vices. For instance, being open-minded, truth-seeking, having a love for knowledge, the courage and willingness to change one's

mind amid counter-evidence, all seem to enable proper functioning.⁷⁴ At the same time, there are also obvious vices that inhibit the proper working of our cognitive faculties that we need to avoid as good epistemic agents: pride, fear, impatience, hate, undue sensitivity, excessive pessimism or optimism and so forth.⁷⁵

Ibn Taymiyya himself considers certain behaviours that might act as impediments for *fīṭra*. At the epistemic level, I think we can understand this in terms of saying that the impairment of *fīṭra* is for the relevant faculties specified by it to malfunction or lose their status as truth-aimed. He suggests that certain desires (*hawā*) or personal motives (*gharaḍ*) may obstruct *fīṭra* from the truth.⁷⁶ He also cites speculative conjecture (*ẓann*), blind imitation of one's social environment (*taqlīd*),⁷⁷ as well as 'pride' and 'ill purposes'⁷⁸ as vices that an epistemic agent may exercise in preventing our natural cognitive capacities rooted in *fīṭra* from acquiring true beliefs. With respect to our *fīṭrī* theistic faculty, we might think that, although of a moral order, 'sin' is also a form of epistemic vice. This is because it forges a distance between God (as the Good) and human beings, and that distance becomes epistemic insofar as God's self-revealing or guidance will be less forthcoming. Ibn Taymiyya indeed does say of sin that 'sins lessen one's love of God in accordance with the amount of sins one performs'.⁷⁹ We might think of sin then as a particularly important epistemic vice to avoid when exercising our theistic faculty.⁸⁰

As such, Ibn Taymiyya suggests that, with respect to *fīṭra* and its overall health, there is a form of nourishment and alimentation that is required.⁸¹ But what does a good epistemic agent with respect to theistic belief look like? It seems reasonable to think the following. Such an agent will be one who sincerely desires to know God with the intention to develop a commitment to Him. This might include such things as praying to God for His guidance and doing one's best to develop an interpersonal relationship with Him. It may also include other virtues such as being open to new evidence, being sincerely truth-seeking, avoiding sin and being morally upright. It might also include a kind of tenacity to persevere in one's beliefs and stick with them long enough to understand them and test their

74 Cf. Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*.

75 Alvin Plantinga notes the importance of avoiding some of these vices and seems to include them as part of the proper functioning of our cognitive faculties. See Plantinga, 'Reliabilism, Analyses and Defeaters'.

76 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar*, vol. 6, p. 271.

77 Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar*, vol. 3, p. 317.

78 Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*, p. 43.

79 Ibn Taymiyya, *The Principle of Love and Desire*, p. 98.

80 Vahid, 'The Noetic Effects of Sin'.

81 Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 10, pp. 146–47.

veracity. Ibn Taymiyya suggests that 'purification and disciplining of the soul' are among the finest ways to acquire non-inferential knowledge (*al-ma'rifa al-ḍarūriyya*), such as theistic knowledge.⁸² But why think that these sorts of epistemic virtues are appropriate in the case of theistic belief? It seems plausible that, if God does exist, then God created us to know Him and hence develop an interpersonal connection with Him. But then in this case it is also reasonable to think that God wants to make possible a meaningful relationship between Him and his servants where they freely choose to enter into communion with God and thus desire to seek and thence find their Lord.⁸³ As such, it is plausible to think that God would make evidence of Himself widely available to all humans, irrespective of their philosophical acumen, but acquiring that evidence might also require the right sort of posture *vis-à-vis* God: valuing Him as a good and seeking to commit oneself to Him.

The above discussion concerning cognitive environments and reliable agency, then, seems to have taught us two fundamental points: we need to be in the right environments (i.e. favourable cognitive environments), and we need to be the right sort of moral and epistemic agents for our theistic faculty to work well on a Taymiyyan view. The implication here is not that we must 'induce' ourselves into believing or 'close ourselves off' from non-theistic evidence. On the contrary, this account suggests the importance of nurturing epistemic virtues (not vices!). But it does suggest that being in a community that welcomes theistic belief and encourages connection with God will be a better cognitive environment to pick up on theistic evidence than otherwise more hostile spaces. The other implication here seems to be that our *fiṭrī* theistic faculty requires a kind of 'attunement'. This is not so dissimilar to cognitive attunement in other non-religious domains. Consider, for example, that, if I lack the prerequisite training in radiology, although I am able to perceive an x-ray photograph when it is put in front of me, I will probably fail to perceive the potential evidence that someone has a brain tumour, for example.⁸⁴ Or consider an ornithologist devoted to the study of birds, who perceives the evidence of the presence of certain kinds of birds due to attuning their perception to pick up on certain sounds. As such, it is not unreasonable to think that our natural theistic faculty requires a form of attunement – through epistemic and moral virtue – in order to perceive the evidence for God and, ultimately, come to know Him in non-inferential fashion.

82 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'āt al-rasā'il al-kubrā*, vol. 2, p. 341.

83 Cf. Evans, *Theistic Signs and Knowledge of God*; Ibn Taymiyya, *MF*, vol. 10, pp. 203–4.

84 Example adapted from Wood, *God*, p. 126.

Defending the Account

To finalise the advancement of *Fitra* Foundationalism put forth in this chapter, it is imperative at this point that I respond to some potentially pressing objections. Specifically, I want to consider four such objections, one with respect to Taymiyyan epistemology in general, and three others concerning Taymiyyan religious epistemology in particular. Let us begin by turning first to the former.

Objections to Taymiyyan Epistemology

Objection 1: 'We need to be able to see for ourselves whether our epistemic grounds for belief are epistemically appropriate bases for believing something'.

Roughly, the idea behind this objection is that we need to have some reason accessible to us to determine whether our grounds for believing something make that belief reasonable for us to hold. If we merely believe something without any evidence as to whether our faculties are properly functioning, reliable and truth-aimed, or whether in fact we have such a faculty at all, it seems that, at least from our perspective, it is just a matter of luck as to whether we arrive at a true belief. Given that Taymiyyan *fitra*-based epistemology does not stipulate this kind of access requirement, the objector holds that this speaks against the account. One way to express the idea is to say that what the objector seeks for an account of knowledge is something like the following principle:

KK principle: in order for *S* to know that *p*, *S* needs to know that *S* knows that *p* ($Kp \rightarrow KKp$).

There are several things that could be said in response to this objection and the KK principle. First, the thesis seems to be problematic insofar as it results in implausible scepticism. For it does not seem that the sort of 'animal knowledge' that plausibly young children and animals do possess will be counted as knowledge according to the KK principle. But if we are right in thinking that young children and animals do possess knowledge of things in their immediate environment and the like, then the principle should be rejected. Second, it does not seem to be the case that *S* will be able to fulfil the KK principle without tacitly acknowledging that external factors are working in their favour. For if *S*'s faculties of reason, perception, introspection, memory and so forth are fallacious, but it is just those faculties that *S* deploys to figure out by way of argument, say, that her grounds for believing that *p* are appropriate bases for believing that *p*, then surely

that will count against *S* being able to know that *S* knows. Ultimately, all *S* can do is to rely on them, and if they are reliable and truth-aimed, *S* will be all the better for it. Hence, something like the principle of epistemic trust (PET) seems to be essential here, not a KK principle.

Third and finally, the charge of luck in the objection is wrong-headed. This is because, as *per* a *fiṭra*-based epistemology, if one acquires knowledge through properly functioning faculties producing a true belief, the fact that a true belief has been acquired will be an exercise of faculties primed for such a belief. Hence, one should say that true belief is properly credited to the relevant subject as being the result of an intellectual virtue that the subject exercises by way of employing their faculties.⁸⁵

Objections to Taymiyyan Religious Epistemology

Objection 2: 'There is no such thing as a fiṭrī theistic faculty, that is merely a presupposition!'

This objection has it that Taymiyyan *fiṭra*-based epistemology cannot merely presume that we have a *fiṭrī* theistic faculty such that, if it is working properly, then we will have theistic knowledge. In fact, perhaps we might think that we do not have such a faculty, especially not one specifically primed for theistic belief in the Islamic sense. One might suppose that to be the case given that the distribution of theistic belief is somewhat uneven (95 per cent in Saudi Arabia, but only 5 per cent in Thailand, for example).⁸⁶ To this, one might say the following.

First, there are empirical grounds for thinking that we do have a combination of cognitive modules as part of our natural cognitive architecture that dispose us to form theistic belief, as *per* recent findings in cognitive science of religion.⁸⁷ Hence, that we have something like a natural theistic faculty or disposition *per se* is not so controversial.

Second, as we have seen earlier, Taymiyyan epistemology recognises that our *fiṭrī* theistic faculty is something that requires a form of attunement and being in favourable cognitive environments. This implies that there is a social impact and role in the formation of theistic belief, insofar as human social practice either nurtures or harms our natural disposition to believe in God in a traditional monotheistic sense. In fact, Max Baker-Hyatt has plausibly argued that God may well have placed great value on the way in which human beings co-operate socially to arrive at the right sort of theistic beliefs collectively and that a side effect of humans'

⁸⁵ Greco, *Achieving Knowledge*, pp. 140–42.

⁸⁶ Baker-Hyatt, 'Epistemic Externalism in the Philosophy of Religion', p. 6.

⁸⁷ Clark and Barrett, 'Reformed Epistemology and the Cognitive Science of Religion'.

epistemic social co-operation is that we often believe *en masse* to some extent. Hence, it is not surprising to find uneven distributions in theistic belief among human culture, despite the reality of our *fiṭrī* theistic faculty.

Third, the postulation of a *fiṭrī* theistic faculty in the account presented was merely conditional. It stated that, *if* we have a *fiṭrī* theistic faculty, then when working properly in congenial environments, we can know that God exists. Recall above that we rejected the KK thesis. This means that, to have knowledge, we need not know that we know that *p*; instead, what matters is that the relevant cognitive faculties are operating in the right sort of way. If this applies to our perceptual, rational and memorial faculties, then it applies to a *fiṭrī* theistic faculty, too. We need not prove that the faculty exists to know, as *per* PET, that we lack counter-evidence by way of a defeater to think our theistic belief is false or produced by an unreliable mechanism.

Objection 3: 'If this account of religious knowledge is upheld, then anything goes!'

The idea behind this objection is that, if we uphold and defend this account of religious epistemology, then any number of bizarre forms of religious or quasi-religious belief can be defended in the same way. In other words, if we claim that we can give a coherent story about how *if* a relevant faculty is working properly, we can know our theistic beliefs, any number of other thinkers can do the same with respect to a whole manner of bizarre beliefs. For instance, why could Linus not present a similarly coherent story about his belief in the Great Pumpkin that comes to visit every Halloween? Provided that his *sensus cucurbitatis* is in good working order, Linus might say, his belief in the Great Pumpkin will be an item of knowledge for him. So, what might we say to this?

First, Taymiyyan religious epistemology is grounded in the idea that there exists a God who intended us to know Him and, hence, plausibly made possible knowledge of Himself through a *fiṭrī* theistic faculty. It is dubious that Great Pumpkinites and the like could tell the same sort of coherent story, because such stories would have to involve an aspect about us being set up by the being in question with a set of faculties to know him. It is hard to take such a story seriously because it involves postulating a physical, contingent entity to explain the cognitive make-up of humans and as having the intention to enable us to know him.⁸⁸

88 Plantinga makes a similar point which he also extends to non-religious naturalists; see also Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 130–31. As such Plantinga seems to regard this sort of faculty-based religious epistemology as being open only to something like traditional theists.

Second, as Keith Yandell has rightly pointed out, faculty-based religious epistemologies (such as *fiṭra*-based epistemology) are not without defence against the claim that, as long as one can construct a coherent story about one's cognitive mechanisms, then just any old belief can be a piece of knowledge on such accounts.⁸⁹ This is because a crucial part of the coherence of the story concerning the reliability of the cognitive mechanisms that produce relevant beliefs will include whether these beliefs are subject to defeaters or not. Indeed, we have seen how defeaters are incorporated into a *fiṭra*-based epistemology. With respect to bizarre beliefs such as belief in the Great Pumpkin, the fact that we lack empirical evidence for its existence, together with its failure to turn up during Halloween, gives us grounds for thinking that there such a thing does not exist.

Third, even if for the sake of argument one concedes that an awareness of the ability of Great Pumpkinites to produce a parallel religious epistemology gives one an undercutting defeater of sorts, this defeater will easily be deflected with little reflective or argumentative burden. For instance, it is reasonable to think that theistic (and even Islamic belief) have a form of favouring the evidence that Great Pumpkinism clearly lacks.⁹⁰ Theistic (and Islamic) beliefs are held by a wide variety of people across different cultures and communities throughout the ages. Such beliefs are held by well-educated individuals and people of varying social classes and life experiences and so forth. This seems to put Great Pumpkinism on the back foot: it requires argument to demonstrate its truth amid this background knowledge.

Objection 4: 'We need an argument to determine which religious claimant is really right!'

An adequate response to this objection probably requires a lot more scope than one can manage in the present chapter.⁹¹ As such, I will just consider one line of approach to addressing this concern. Roughly, the objection is that, because theists of different stripes can (unlike Great Pumpkinites) properly adopt the same strategy to defend the positive epistemic status of their own tradition-specific theistic beliefs, without recourse to arguments to determine which claimant is right, a sort of impasse is reached.⁹² This impasse is thought to generate an undercutting defeater for each religious believer given that neither possesses a positive argument to demonstrate

89 Yandell, 'Some Reflections on Religious Knowledge', p. 35.

90 Cf. Scott, 'Return of the Great Pumpkin'.

91 See my recent article on this topic: Turner, 'Islamic Insights on Religious Disagreement'.

92 DePoe, 'Classical Evidentialism', p. 126.

the truth of his tradition-specific theistic belief.⁹³ For each one claims to have similar profound experiences of the divine or a strong intuitive sense that He exists as they understand Him, and both may be equally intellectually virtuous, as well as having access to the same sort of evidence. The challenge is particularly problematic for Taymiyyan religious epistemology, because such an epistemology seeks to show how one can know God as *per* its specific tradition without arguments. But then, so the objection goes, given that at least most reflective theists are aware of this sort of religious disagreement, arguments will be needed to address this defeater. Hence, *ultima facie*, arguments will be necessary to know God in the tradition-specific sense after all. So, how might one respond to this objection?

First, although this objection might pose some concern for reflective theists, it does not seem to be problematic for many ordinary believers.⁹⁴ This is because many ordinary believers, although aware of other religious peoples, will probably not be aware of the sort of parity and general problem that potential religious disagreement generates. Note that defeaters in this context are rationality defeaters, and, as such, they are person-specific. It is unlikely that the rationality of the old lady's faith will be undermined insofar as she is entrenched in her spiritual practice without proper awareness of the epistemic implications of religious disagreement. Hence, if this is a concern at all, it must only be so for reflective theists.

Second, it is plausible to think that reflective theists will have arguments available at their disposal; arguments which they would consider favouring evidence in support of their tradition-specific beliefs. Thus, in the end, if arguments are necessary for reflective theists, there is little to be concerned about here. Nevertheless, if this concession is made, then a certain qualification is in order. Rather than one's tradition-specific theistic belief being known non-inferentially for all those whose *fiṭrī* theistic faculty is intact without recourse to argument, it might only be for non-reflective theists. In the case of reflective theists, however, they would still have *prima facie* warrant for their theistic beliefs, but to achieve *ultima facie* warrant for them (that is, knowledge), they would need to have arguments to hand.⁹⁵

Third, perhaps one might nonetheless insist that, even for at least some reflective theists, arguments may still not be necessary. Consider the following scenario. Imagine, for instance, that you have been accused of committing a crime, such as stealing a highly confidential government document. The jury assesses the publicly accessible evidence brought

93 Aijaz, 'The Diderot Objection to Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology', pp. 12–13.

94 Cf. Gellman, 'In Defence of a Contented Religious Exclusivism'.

95 Greco, 'Calvinists vs. Catholics on Religious Knowledge', p. 18. This view is roughly what Michael Bergmann has termed 'Moderate Non-Inferentialism about Religious Belief (MNR)'; see Bergmann, 'Reformed Epistemology', p. 43.

forth by the prosecutors and conclude that you are guilty. But suppose that you have a distinct memory of your whereabouts on the day the alleged crime took place, making it very clear to you that you could not have committed the crime. Despite being unable to offer sufficient refutation against the evidence assessed by the jury, it seems reasonable to think that you would still be within your intellectual rights to give greater weight to your private experience than to the publicly accessible evidence against you. If so, then one might extend the same thought to at least some private religious experiences amid the presence of defeaters to one's tradition-specific theistic beliefs. Hence, perhaps the reflective theist (and others) can maintain their rationality and possess tradition-specific theistic knowledge in virtue of their profound religious experience, even without recourse to argumentation.⁹⁶

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to offer a contemporary brand of foundationalist epistemology in an Islamic milieu. In focusing on Ibn Taymiyya's concept of *fiṭra*, the chapter has developed a faculty-based epistemology and non-inferentialist religious epistemology. It has positioned itself as a plausible alternative to classical foundationalism insofar as it avoids an implausible kind of scepticism and resonates with some of our basic intuitions about knowledge. If successful in countering some key objections, it has shown how theistic belief may be a type of foundational knowledge for religious believers.

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96 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 367.

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CHAPTER 11

Dealing with Defeaters for Warranted Islamic Belief: A Reply to Turner

Erik Baldwin

Introduction

In ‘An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology’, Jamie Turner has argued that his Taymiyyan extension of Plantinga’s standard Aquinas/Calvin model (A/C model) is preferable to the one I have proposed in ‘On the Prospects of an Islamic Externalist Account of Warrant’ and further developed in Baldwin and McNabb’s *Plantingian Religious Epistemology and World Religions*. Among other things, Turner has contended that, because my model brings on board internalist and evidentialist elements, it fails to account for how Islamic belief can be properly basic in Plantinga’s full sense. I think that he is onto something; I think my articulation of the Islamic human design plan could be stated more clearly and better fleshed out in certain respects. And, admittedly, my model is somewhat out-of-sync with Plantinga’s. However, I do not think my model is in as bad a shape as Turner has taken it to be. Elsewhere, making use of *kalām*-inspired arguments and reasons internal to Islamic philosophical and theological traditions, Tyler McNabb and I have argued that Plantinga’s Reformed Epistemology fits better with our *kalām* approach than it does with Turner’s Traditionalist/Taymiyyan one.¹ I bracket that line of argument, as it involves matters of controversy pertaining to *kalām* and Islamic theology and law more generally, waters too deep to tread here. In this paper, I shall first clarify some of Turner’s misunderstandings of my model. I will then resituate Turner’s objections to my model within the context of the disagreement over which of the multiple viable extensions of Plantinga’s standard A/C model is true and show how

1 Based on our co-authored presentation: ‘Islamic Reformed Epistemology: A Friendly Reply to Turner’, International Symposium on ‘Imagining Islamic Epistemology for the 21st Century’, Cambridge, 3 July 2022.

my model is better situated to deal with that problem. I will close with the promising suggestion that, by taking the best elements of both models, it is possible to formulate a conjunctive model of Warranted Islamic Belief better than either of our models taken individually.

Revisiting Turner's Critique

In his critique, Turner has proceeded as though my model endorses an awareness condition on knowledge full-stop and without qualification or limitation. For instance, he has maintained that my model does not satisfy The Design Thesis ('that human beings are created in accord with a design plan one aim of which is the production of true beliefs')² in a sufficiently Plantingian manner, because it includes the internalist requirement that 'the justifying reason for a basic belief, or indeed any belief, must somehow be available to the believer'.³ He has associated my view with Roderick Chisholm's idea that 'merely by reflecting on his own conscious state' one can 'formulate a set of epistemic principles that will enable him to find out, with respect to any possible belief he has, whether he is justified in having that belief'.⁴ Quoting Michael Bergmann's characterisation of internalism, according to which 'an essential feature of internalism is that it makes a subject's actual or potential awareness of some justification-contributor a necessary condition', he has contended that my model supposes that satisfying such a condition is necessary for warranted Islamic belief.⁵ Summing up, he has written:

... if one is to add a second-order awareness requirement in the case of theistic belief or any other, then S's belief in p would not be *warranted* until self-conscious careful reflection at the second-order level of cognition occurs. Only after its 'evaluation' can S then *properly* accept p into his scheme of beliefs. However, this notion of *warrant* with respect to belief is clearly not in line with Plantingian thought. Plantinga's A/C model holds that beliefs can be *warranted* in the properly basic sense at the first-order level of apprehension.⁶

However, *contra* Turner, I do not deny that beliefs can be warranted in the properly basic sense at the first-order level of apprehension. In my model, one is led by means of the *qalb* (spiritual perception) to belief in God and other spiritual realities. Thereupon, warranted beliefs are formed by the

2 Baldwin and McNabb, *Plantingian Religious Epistemology and World Religions*, p. 60.

3 Turner, 'An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology', p. 771.

4 Turner, 'An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology', p. 771.

5 Turner, 'An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology', p. 772.

6 Turner, 'An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology', p. 773.

normal operation of the '*aql*¹' (mind). Beliefs involving second-order cognition and self-reflective awareness of the sort associated with the operation of the '*aql*²' are necessary only when beliefs produced by the *qalb* are subject to doubt. In short, in my model, sometimes '*aql*¹' beliefs of doubt constitute defeaters for *qalb* beliefs and '*aql*²' beliefs are necessary to deal with those defeaters in a reasonable way. It is in this spirit that I have written that 'one must exercise '*aql*' in both of its senses if one is to have knowledge (at least of spiritual realities such as God)'.⁷ In context, it is clear that my usage of 'must' here is not unqualified but limited. In the paragraph just prior to the above quote, I have written:

While God intends that we believe in Him, He wants us to have a particular kind of knowledge of Him, one that requires considerable time, growth, commitment, and reflection in order to cultivate and appreciate. While God is merciful and forgiving, true and genuine knowledge of Him is not 'easy knowledge', but requires a certain measure of obedience and faith.⁸

The kind of knowledge of God that believers acquire when they form '*aql*²' beliefs so as to reasonably deal with defeaters for *qalb* beliefs involves this deeper and more robust understanding of God and of spiritual realities than that which can be had by the operation of *qalb* or '*aql*¹' alone. Having this knowledge involves a higher degree of confidence in the veracity of one's beliefs, which is concomitant with having overcome doubts about them. It cannot be produced immediately, nor is it simply the product of properly functioning cognitive faculties and the like.

On a related point, Turner overlooks or under-appreciates that I defend a limited second-order awareness condition on knowledge. I do not claim or suggest that justifying reasons for any belief must be available to the believer, or that reflection on one's conscious states allows people to formulate and employ a set of epistemic principles that will enable them to determine for any belief whether it is justified. I do not claim or suggest that actual or potential awareness of some justification-contributor is a necessary condition on warranted Islamic belief as such. I have written:

... on the hypothesis that God's design plan for us does include this capacity, it is necessary to acknowledge some sort of awareness condition on knowledge of God. Because the applicability of an awareness requirement is not full-stop, and since the capacity for true and genuine knowledge is a contingent feature of the human design

7 Baldwin, 'On the Prospects of an Islamic Externalist Account of Warrant', p. 30.

8 Baldwin, 'On the Prospects of an Islamic Externalist Account of Warrant', p. 30.

plan, I call the kind of awareness at issue here 'limited awareness'. If God created us with a capacity for true and genuine, second-order knowledge of Him, our knowing that fact would provide us with a sufficiently strong motive to accept a limited awareness requirement on knowledge. Consequently, while externalism is inconsistent with an unqualified awareness requirement, it is consistent with the limited awareness requirement. Islam does not require an unqualified awareness requirement and is consistent with the truth of a limited awareness requirement. Thus, it is possible to formulate an Islamic and externalist theory of knowledge.⁹

Again, in my model, prior to doubt, Islamic belief is produced in a properly basic way and is warranted in full accord with Plantinga's epistemology. I am not wed to the specifics of just how properly basic and warranted belief in God is initially produced in Muslims. The primary concern of my model is to provide a model of warranted Islamic Belief that can account for how Muslims can appropriately deal with doubts about the truth of Islamic Belief that will arise.

There are similar misunderstandings in Turner's discussion of how, in his view, my model fails to satisfy The Immediacy Thesis ('God endows humans with special cognitive faculties or belief-forming processes through theistic belief that can be known in an epistemically immediate and basic manner')¹⁰ in a sufficiently Plantingian way. According to Turner, while belief in God is produced at the first-order level immediately, it is not properly basic in the sense of being warranted because 'a belief, on this model, is only said to be sufficient for proper basicity – that is, warrant – when it has fulfilled the second-order requirement'.¹¹ Apparently, he has contended that my model supposes that belief in God can be warranted only if it satisfies my limited awareness condition. However, my view is rather that, when sufficiently strong doubts about Islamic belief arise, whatever degree of warrant that Muslims have for beliefs produced immediately and in a properly basic way is not by itself sufficient for them to overcome doubts about it. Before doubts arise, however, Islamic belief can be properly basic and warranted for Muslims in full accord with Plantinga's Proper Functionalism.

I have formulated my model to provide a built-in way of resolving and dealing with doubts about the truth of Islamic belief. One reason for doing this is that I first engaged the possibility of extending Plantinga's account of warrant to cover Islamic belief in the context of what I perceived to be a diversity problem with Plantinga's general epistemological approach as

9 Baldwin, 'On the Prospects of an Islamic Externalist Account of Warrant', p. 26.

10 Baldwin and McNabb, *Plantingian Religious Epistemology and World Religions*, p. 60.

11 Turner, 'An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology', p. 774.

articulated in *Warranted Christian Belief* – namely, that members of other religious traditions could claim that their beliefs, too, are properly basic and warranted – and this possibility takes some of the steam out of his proposal. Another is that I am convinced that there are theological and philosophical reasons internal to Islam for thinking that God intends Muslims to have doubts and then to overcome them and to thereby acquire a more robust knowledge of Himself.¹² It is only natural, therefore, to consider why reflective Muslims ought to be concerned about overcoming doubts about Islamic belief that arise in this context of diversity.

The Multiple Viable Extensions (MVE) Defeater

In *Warranted Christian Belief*, Plantinga admits that many systems of belief are seriously analogous to Christian belief, such that true belief in them could be properly basic and warranted.¹³ Insofar as Plantinga shows how this could go for Christians, similarly, with appropriate amendments and modifications, we can show how believers of other faith traditions could hold their religious specific claims to be warranted in a properly basic way, too. In *Plantingian Religious Epistemology and World Religions*, Baldwin and McNabb have considered in detail a variety of world religions in India, China and the West, making a case for thinking that there indeed are multiple viable non-Christian extensions of the standard A/C model. To be viable, a given extension must be more than merely logically possible or a work of fiction. It must be epistemically possible; that is, it must be ‘consistent with what we know, where “what we know” is what all (or most) of the participants in the discussion agree on’.¹⁴ It must also be consistent with obvious empirical and historical facts and have some degree of empirical adequacy. Arguably, Judaism, Islam and Mādhva Vedānta extensions are viable in this sense, and it is reasonable to think there could be viable Neo-Confucianist and Daoist extensions, too.¹⁵

I contend that awareness of the fact that there are multiple viable extensions of Plantinga’s Standard A/C model gives rise to the Multiple Viable Extensions (MVE) defeater. I have previously summed up the argument for this claim thus:

Plantinga writes that, ‘To give a model of a proposition or state of affairs S is to show how it could be that S is true or actual. The model

12 See Baldwin, *Fully Informed Reasonable Disagreement and Tradition Based Perspectivalism*, pp. 30–33; Baldwin and McNabb, *Plantingian Religious Epistemology and World Religions*, pp. 221–28.

13 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 350.

14 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 169.

15 See Baldwin and McNabb, *Plantingian Religious Epistemology and World Religions*.

itself will be another proposition or state of affairs, one such that it is clear (1) that it is not merely logically true but epistemically possible and (2) that if it is true, then so is the target proposition'. According to the standard A/C model, God designed our cognitive faculties such that when they function properly, we naturally and spontaneously come to believe its target propositions in appropriate circumstances. But God would want us to have access to more detailed and specific revelation of himself and his purposes as well. Accordingly, Plantinga extends the standard A/C model to cover uniquely Christian beliefs about God. But the standard A/C model may be extended to cover non-Christian beliefs about God, too. Given that each extension of the standard A/C model makes exclusive claims about the nature and purposes of God, at most only one extension could be fully correct. Thus, one who affirms some extension of the standard A/C model is more likely than not to affirm an incorrect extension. (Specifically, the probability that a given extension is true is $1/x$ where x equals the number of viable extensions of the Standard A/C model.) Consequently, odds are that it is more likely than not that one's specific beliefs about God – the very beliefs that are supposed to be warranted given the extension of the A/C model that one accepts – are not produced in the way that one supposed and thus lack warrant. Therefore, Plantingans who are aware of the fact that there are multiple viable extensions of the standard A/C model must have some reason or evidence for thinking that the extension of the standard A/C model he or she affirms is correct. At the very least, one must have a non-question begging reason for thinking that the other extensions are probably incorrect. But, clearly, if one relies on reasons or evidences at this juncture, although one's beliefs about God might be warranted, they would not be properly basic. Accordingly, I concluded, Plantinga's A/C models (at least his formulation of them) do not provide a fully satisfactory account of how belief in God could also be basic and warranted.¹⁶

Baldwin and McNabb have further crystallised the MVE objection. For any viable extension of Plantinga's standard A/C model, if it is true and if its target propositions are produced in believers whose cognitive faculties function properly in an environment sufficiently similar for which they were designed, and so on, then the target propositions of that model are properly basic and warranted for them. Plantingians are thus committed to the following conditional:

16 Baldwin, 'On the Prospects of an Islamic Externalist Account of Warrant', pp. 20–21.

1. If the extension of the Standard Aquinas/Calvin model I affirm is true, then, given that my cognitive faculties are functioning properly, and so on, my central creedal-specific beliefs about God are both internally and externally rational and, if true, probably warranted.¹⁷

Plantingians maintain that the consequent (1) holds only for those who affirm the correct and true extension of the model. As such, they are committed to the truth of (2) and (3):

2. Given that only one extension of the standard Aquinas/Calvin model can be fully correct, it follows that most of its multiple viable extensions are not fully correct.
3. Insofar as a given viable extension is incorrect, the central creedal beliefs that are purported to be internally and externally rational and warranted in accord with an incorrect extension of the standard Aquinas/Calvin model are externally irrational, false and warranted for those who hold them.¹⁸

In some broadly possible way, Plantingians admit that the model they accept to be true might be false. Hence, they also affirm something like (4):

4. Most of the viable extensions of the standard Aquinas/Calvin model are not fully correct, and insofar as the extension of it that I accept is not fully correct, it follows that some of my central creedal specific beliefs about God are externally irrational, false and unwarranted.¹⁹

Obviously, no self-respecting Plantingian thinks that the model they accept is false or incorrect; rather, they think that alternative models are not fully correct, that they contain serious falsehoods, and the like. Even so, each affirms (4) to be true of themselves in a trivial or logical sense. Associated with each extension is an error theory that purports to explain why others have gotten things wrong. As such, Plantingians non-trivially affirm (5):

5. Given my error theory, which explains why I have got things correct and why others have gotten things so wrong, although most of the viable extensions of the standard Aquinas/Calvin model are not fully correct, it is reasonable for me to maintain that my creedal beliefs are both internally and externally rational and, if true, probably warranted.²⁰

17 Baldwin and McNabb, *Plantingian Religious Epistemology and World Religions*, p. 263.

18 Baldwin and McNabb, *Plantingian Religious Epistemology and World Religions*, p. 264.

19 Baldwin and McNabb, *Plantingian Religious Epistemology and World Religions*, p. 264.

20 Baldwin and McNabb, *Plantingian Religious Epistemology and World Religions*, p. 265.

A moment's reflection reveals that not only are most competing extensions of the standard A/C model false in important respects, but most of the error theories associated with them are false, too. Plantingians, then, are committed to (6):

6. All Plantingians know that most of the error theories that are purported to explain why some Plantingians have gotten things correct and why others have gotten things so wrong are not fully correct but rather contain significant and serious falsehoods, too.²¹

Let us sum up the epistemic situation. In addition to Christian Plantingians, there are (or at least could be) Jewish, Muslim and Mādhva Vedāntan Plantingians, and maybe even Neo-Confucianist and Daoist ones, too. All of them maintain, making use of the same Plantingian epistemological machinery, that their respective creedal-specific beliefs are properly basic and warranted in a basic way. We know that most of these systems of religious beliefs are not fully correct but rather contain significant and serious falsehoods. We know that, while those who affirm a false extension of the standard A/C model are subject to serious cognitive error, none take themselves to be making any such error.

We may further raise the stakes and suppose that at least some Plantingians who disagree about which extension of the standard A/C model is true are epistemic peers: that (1) each is aware of roughly the same data – namely, the same relevant overall body of publicly accessible and sharable evidence; (2) each has roughly the same publicly accessible and sharable evidence; (3) each has had roughly equal time to consider that body of evidence; (4) each is roughly equal in terms of cognitive ability; (5) each has roughly the same relevant background knowledge; and (6) each has gone about their investigations in circumstances that are roughly equal – for instance, none are plagued by annoying distractions or other impediments.²²

Reflecting on the above situation, and even if we set aside the controversial epistemic peerhood claim, it would be unreasonable for Plantingians simply to remain unconcerned about whether the model that they accept is correct. There is reason to wonder whether the model one affirms to be true really is true, and this threatens to generate a defeater for accepting the truth of the target propositions of whatever extension of the standard A/C model one accepts. I am not saying that those who reflect on the facts here necessarily acquire a defeater for their respective religious beliefs. But it is plausible to think that at least some will be somewhat less confident about

21 Baldwin and McNabb, *Plantingian Religious Epistemology and World Religions*, p. 265.

22 For more on these disagreement factors, see Frances, *Disagreement*, pp. 18–26.

the truth of the model that they accept. For my part, I have defended at length that Plantingians ought to be concerned and consequently ought to acquire a defeater, but I will not press that point here.²³ Instead, I will focus on whether the strategies that Plantingians employ to ward off the threat of defeat are plausible.

Plantingians are wont to deny that those in the epistemic situation I describe acquire the above kind of defeater. Let us consider and evaluate reasons for thinking that. As Proper Functionalists, Plantingians affirm that holding one's religious beliefs is a matter of whether that belief output is correct, given the human design plan. According to the 'no defeater' response, as long as a Plantingian 'still firmly believes that p after she reflects on the attempted [MVE] defeater, and, her belief that p is the result of the proper function constraints being in place, her belief is warranted'.²⁴ Presumably, Turner would endorse something like this classic Plantingian response but fine-tune it to include details of his model of warranted Islamic belief, including a Taymiyyan understanding of *fiṭra* and the direct experience of signs (*āyāt*) and the like.²⁵ Andrew Moon, following Michael Bergmann, has suggested a similar deflective solution that employs benignly epistemically circular reasoning to support the contention that one's religious beliefs are true. Briefly, circular reasoning employed to deflect a defeater is benign when one has no reason to doubt the trustworthiness or reliability of one's beliefs and employs those beliefs in such a way so as to prevent defeaters from arising.²⁶ For instance, suitably adapting Moon's example, if 'Muslim belief is true' and 'if Muslim belief is true, then one's belief "Muslim belief is true" was reliably formed' are both true, then 'One's belief "Muslim belief is true is probably true"' follows.²⁷ One problem with the Classic Plantingian response is that, from the respective epistemic perspective of each member of a group of Plantingians, it would seem to be a matter of epistemic luck just whose creedal-specific beliefs are warranted. It strains credibility to think that it would be appropriate for each member of a group of reasonable and reflective Plantingians aware of the MVE defeater simply to proceed as before – their situation is worse if they are epistemic peers. Another problem is that attempts to deflect the MVE defeater suppose that the defeater fails to get off the ground. However, arguably, a defeater is at play, in which case

23 See Baldwin, 'Could the Extended Aquinas/Calvin Model Defeat Basic Christian Belief?'; Baldwin, *Fully Informed Reasonable Disagreement and Tradition Based Perspectivalism*; Baldwin and McNabb, *Plantingian Religious Epistemology and World Religions*.

24 Baldwin and McNabb, *Plantingian Religious Epistemology and World Religions*, p. 271.

25 See Turner, 'An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology', pp. 775–85.

26 Moon, 'Circular and Question-Begging Responses to Religious Disagreement and Debunking Arguments', p. 795.

27 Moon, 'Circular and Question-Begging Responses to Religious Disagreement and Debunking Arguments', pp. 793–94.

attempts to deflect it are too late. What good would it be for a knight to raise one's shield to deflect an arrow if it has already struck? The primary advantage of my model of Islamic belief over Turner's model is that it can readily account for how Muslims ought to go about dealing reasonably with the MVE defeater, as well as other defeaters. In contrast, it is not clear how Muslims ought to deal with the MVE defeater in Turner's model. Yes, Turner's model is more traditionally Plantingian, but at what cost?

Note that, in my model, Muslims who are not aware of potential defeaters for Islamic belief can have properly basic belief in God fully in accord with Plantinga's proper functionalist account of warrant. After all, plenty of Muslims never doubt their creedal specific beliefs because they have not been exposed to reasons to doubt them. So long as their religious beliefs are produced in the right sort of way, if their cognitive faculties function properly in an epistemic environment for which they were designed, and so on, then their beliefs about God are properly basic and warranted. But if a Muslim has reason to be concerned about whether they affirm the correct extension of the standard A/C model, and if they acquire sufficiently strong doubts about the truth of their creedal-specific beliefs, then they should go about dealing with those doubts reasonably. According to my model, because God intends Muslims to have reflective knowledge of himself, a kind of knowledge that is not acquired merely when a cogniser satisfies proper-function constraints, God intends that Muslims be exposed to various doubts the proper resolution of which serves to strengthen their belief and buttress their faith. Wrestling with and overcoming the MVE defeater is one way to produce this deeper kind of knowledge of God.

Towards a Hybrid Model?

The above considerations imply that one must choose between Turner and Baldwin's models. But is making an 'either/or' decision necessary? Perhaps there is a 'both/and' solution. In broad outline, this seems easy enough. Take Turner's Taymiyyan model, which, I happily concede, does a better and more elegant job of showing how properly basic and warranted Islamic Belief could be produced in Muslims, at least initially so and prior to doubts. Then add the most important features of my model – namely, that sometimes '*aq^l*' beliefs constitute defeaters for *qalb* beliefs and that '*aq^l*' beliefs are necessary to deal with those defeaters in a reasonable way, so that Muslims can go on to have a deeper, more robust kind of knowledge of God that simply cannot be had just in case their cognitive faculties are functioning properly, and so on. It remains to be shown just how this hybrid model could be coherent and feasible, but I think I have gestured in the general direction well enough so that readers can imagine or work out for themselves how things could go. The takeaway is that, if Muslims lack a

reason to worry about which extension of Plantinga's standard A/C model is true or otherwise lack a reason to doubt Islamic belief or some element of it, everything goes according to Turner's model. However, if doubts arise, so that Muslims must appropriately deal with proposed defeaters for their creedal-specific beliefs, the relevant features of my model come into play and believers go about cultivating intellectual virtues and engaging in reflective reasoning to deal with epistemic defeaters in a reasonable way.

It is important to emphasise that being reasonable in the requisite sense is not simply a matter of being internally and externally rational in accord with proper function constraints. It is not something that happens automatically in or to one's cognitive equipment as much as it is something that an epistemic agent voluntarily does. Following Robert Audi, I take it that a 'reasonable person is, in a suitably stable way, *governed* by reason; and a reasonable belief or action is, though not necessarily *reasoned*, of a kind of exhibiting support *by reasons*'.²⁸ Being reasonable involves coming to acknowledge, by means of a higher-order judgement, the normative force of the appropriateness of one's first-order reasons.²⁹ *Qua* epistemic agents, reasonable people have and exercise epistemic virtues, including the love of knowledge, firmness, courage and caution, humility, autonomy, generosity and practical wisdom; they aim to hold beliefs in a reflective way and to govern themselves reasonably with respect to their formation and sustenance.³⁰

In conclusion, I do not see any unsurmountable obstacles for the construction of the sort of hybrid model I envision, but a great deal of work would need to be done to appropriately formulate it. For my part, if Turner's model and my own are mutually exclusive, I think there are, all things considered, reasons to prefer mine. Even so, while I think Turner's criticisms of my model fail to hit their mark, I think his Taymiyyan model is quite good. It is more elegant than mine and does a better job of explaining how Muslim belief can be properly basic and warranted, at least initially and prior to doubts. If the details can be made to work, I think my proposed hybrid model would be preferable to either Turner's model or my own taken individually.

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CHAPTER 12

Creation, Sin and Salvation: Essential Categories for a Christian-Theistic Epistemology

K. Scott Oliphint

Introduction

One of the more fascinating, and challenging, aspects of religious epistemology is the coincidence of vocabulary that various religions employ. In the religious traditions of Judaism, Islam and Christianity, concepts and terms such as God, revelation, sin, salvation and so on are central to their respective religious approaches. It should be expected, therefore, that many if not most of the terms that I, as a Christian, will be using in this paper will be important in Islam and Judaism as well.

One of the reasons why there are such deep differences between these particular religions, however, is that the meanings of the identical terms used are substantially different in each case. In attempting to set forth a Christian-theistic epistemology in contrast to an Islamic or Jewish epistemology, therefore, there will be some considerable similarity of language, even though such similarity will be accompanied by deep differences of meaning.

My goal in this paper will be to present the three inextricably linked aspects of creation, sin, and salvation for a proper understanding of a Christian-theistic epistemology. By a 'Christian-theistic' epistemology, I mean a specifically Reformed Epistemology, in distinction from a Roman Catholic or generally Protestant view (though there will be inevitable overlap at some points). To do that, I will need to attach specifically Christian meanings to terms that both Islam and Christianity share (given this volume's focus on Islamic epistemology). Without detailing the substantial differences, I will point to some Islamic variations of some of the shared terms along the way.

Creation as an Epistemological Category

In his fascinating essay, 'Taking St. Paul Seriously', Merold Westphal argues for the necessity of sin as an epistemological category.¹ I propose to accept Westphal's argument, but to add creation and salvation to the epistemological mix as well. As important as the noetic effects of sin are for a Christian epistemology, such effects can only properly be understood in the context of creation as the presupposition of our fall into sin and salvation as the (principal) restoration of our cognitive faculties.

Although the Biblical concepts of creation, sin and salvation encompass the sum of human history, we will set our focus on the noetic implications of these three concepts in order to show their importance for a Christian epistemology. These concepts, taken together, provide the foundation for a Christian epistemological structure. That is, a Christian analysis of the problem of human knowledge must necessarily include these three stages of human existence and knowledge.

On the sixth day, God created man (male and female) in His image.² In order to highlight the epistemological implications of this creation as 'image of God', a clarifying word or two is in order. First, Christians and Muslims affirm the absolute transcendence of God. We affirm that God's character is such that he cannot be identified with anything in creation; He created it all, and he transcends it all. Not only so, but He transcends it all immutably. That is, it is not possible for God to become 'less-than-God' such that He is no longer the immutable, transcendent, eternal God.

Christianity teaches that God created Adam and Eve in history and placed them in a Garden, which was located on the Earth. When God creates Adam, and Eve from Adam, in His image, Christians recognise that there is now something in creation that will display, in an analogous way, what God Himself is like. The 'image of God', then, is like a painting or a photograph of a landscape; neither a painting nor a photograph is identical to that landscape, but both are meant to show what the landscape is like. Without the landscape, there could be no painting or photograph. When a painting is made, it is what it is only because of the landscape of which it is a picture. The landscape, and the painting of it, are 'ontologically' distinct. They do not and cannot overlap. This is true also for man – male and female – as the image of God.

In the creation account in Genesis, we see that, in the beginning, God already was. As He creates, He speaks creation into existence. Thus, God is

1 See Westphal, 'Taking St. Paul Seriously'.

2 There is some debate in Islamic theology concerning whether God made Adam in his image, and, if so, how to understand 'image'. See, for example, Melchert, 'God Created Adam in His Image'. Melchert has argued, at least from the perspective of the Hadith tradition, that Islamic tradition leans toward an affirmation of Adam as image of God.

one who communicates. As He creates, He makes distinctions among those things that He creates. He creates elements of light and darkness (Gen. 1:4–5); he creates expanses, and waters and dry land (Gen. 1:6–10). He then creates plants and all kinds of animals. Thus, God is one who distinguishes between different aspects of His creation. By day six, God takes counsel with Himself before He creates Adam (Gen. 1:26–27). When God creates Adam, and then Eve, there is now a fundamentally different and enhanced relationship established between them. As with the animals, God commanded Adam and Eve to ‘be fruitful and multiply’ (cf. Gen. 1:22, 28).

But there are two substantial differences introduced between God and His human creations that were not part of the rest of creation. First, God speaks to Adam and Eve in such a way that they can respond to Him (Gen. 2:16, 19, 23). Clearly, from the beginning, there was a relationship established by God between Adam and Eve, such that they would know God as their Creator and Lord. God then tells Adam and Eve to subdue and have dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:28). This command has a plethora of epistemological implications attached to it. It assumes that Adam and Eve are created in such a way that they know the God who has made them, and they know the creation around them in all its goodness and according to the distinctions which God has made in it.

Thus, even though everything in creation was ‘very good’ (Gen. 1:31), in commanding them to subdue the earth, God gave Adam and Eve good work to do, work that would enhance and bring forth the latent potential in all that God had made in creation. To ‘subdue’ and ‘have dominion’ over creation, when everything was ‘very good’, meant that man was created to show forth and display the goodness of all aspects of God’s creation, to be care-takers of what God had made and had given them to oversee. The presumption of their knowledge of creation emanates from God’s instructions to them.

Second, God gives Adam and Eve a command, the transgression of which would result in their punishment (Gen. 2:16, 3:1–3). Embedded in that command, therefore, is Adam and Eve’s responsibility before God. If they obeyed the command, they would continue in the life they had been given, which was ‘very good’. If they disobeyed, they would die. Like the command to subdue and have dominion, this command sets Adam and Eve apart from the rest of creation. God established a relationship with them both in which they were ‘little rulers’ under him and in which they were responsible to do as He has commanded. This relationship is typically referred to as a ‘covenant’.³ Since God established this covenantal relationship between

3 For a helpful analysis of a Reformed view of covenant, see Vos, ‘The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology’. See also the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter Seven. For an Islamic perspective of covenant, see Lumbard, ‘Covenant and Covenants in the Qur’an’.

Himself and His human creatures, everyone descending from Adam will also be in such a relationship (see Rom. 5:12–21; Acts 17:26).

More specifically for our purposes, we can see that to be the image of God means to know God as responsible creatures and to know His creation in all its differences and diversity. The knowledge of God that Adam and Eve had, and the knowledge of creation itself, was owing to God's own communication to them. Since everything was 'very good', we can assume that knowing God and His world was the 'natural and immediate' state of human existence for Adam and Eve. They were made to know God and to know His world in such a way that they might obey God's command to subdue and have dominion over it, and to avoid the forbidden tree.

We can stipulate here that the image of God, however, as we shall see, corrupted by the fall of man, nevertheless obtains for every human being (see, for example, Gen. 9:6). Human beings did not cease to be human beings when man fell into sin, nor did they cease to be the image of God. They are, instead, still responsible to display, in a limited and analogous way, what God is like. They are also responsible for the knowledge that they have of God and His world. To be a covenantal creature, to be the image of God, is to be one who knows God and who knows what He requires of us. Thus, we can designate the status of the 'image of God' (IG) of Adam and Eve, and of every human person after them, as the basic ontological status of every human being. Thus, (IG) is true for all human beings such that:

- For every person S , $S \rightarrow (IG)$

Therefore, each and every human being, given (IG), is created as one who knows God and knows His world.⁴

Sin as an Epistemological Category

But there is a serious problem that enters into God's creation on earth, the problem of sin. In Genesis 3, we read about the entrance of sin through Adam, as well as its implications for the rest of creation. Because of this sin, Eve is cursed, Adam is cursed, the serpent is cursed, and the rest of creation abides under a curse (see Gen. 3:14–19; Rom. 8:2–23). In the Christian tradition, the sin of Adam, because he is the covenant head of all of humanity,

4 Many in the Christian tradition would also recognise that the command to subdue the earth and have dominion over it remains for human beings even after the fall. Given the fall into sin, however, such commands become applied in a distorted and perverted way.

is passed down to every human being.⁵ Because of Adam, we are born as sinful people. The originally 'good' creation is now wholly affected by the sin of Adam.

This universal sinfulness does not negate our ontological status as image of God (IG). It does, however, alter that status in significant ways. Since the entrance of sin through Adam, it is now the case that every human being has what we might call a 'totalising' bias against God. By 'totalising', we mean that every aspect of our character is radically affected by sin. Sin is a mindset, or perhaps better, a 'heart' condition, such that what we want and what we choose is always opposed to God and his character (see Rom. 3:10–18, 8:5–8). This 'totalising' effect has deep epistemological implications. There is a historical movement, therefore, from the image of God as 'very good' and in fellowship with God (IG), to being the 'fallen image of God' (FIG), which means that all our human faculties are in opposition to God and his holiness. Thus, from Genesis 3 forward, . . .

- For every person *S*, $S \rightarrow (\text{FIG})$

We should note here that (2) presupposes (1), such that people remain as image of God, (IG), but the image itself has been affected by our sin, not slightly but deeply. Every person is now the image of God, but that image is damaged by our fallen, sinful character. That is, every human being is identified with the covenant head of all humanity, Adam, and thus is devoid of any righteousness (see Rom. 3:10–18, 5:12–21). As image, we remain covenant creatures, but we abide under God's wrath, not under His goodness as it was in creation.

As we have said, this sinful status has deep epistemological implications. In the essay by Westphal mentioned above, he has argued that Christian philosophy must be more intentional in assessing the effects of sin on epistemology. Specifically, if we recognise that epistemology is properly focused on the 'nature and limits of human knowledge', we should also recognise that 'sin should be an essential epistemological category'.⁶ Westphal has contended that foundationalism, by definition, could not affirm the reality of sin as an epistemological category. Foundationalism, so Westphal has said, is an attempt to try to neutralise the epistemological effects of sin.⁷

5 The point of sin as a state of man is denied in Islamic theology. However, some in Islam have recognised the serious consequences of Adam's sin for the rest of humanity. See, for example, Reynolds, 'Original Sin and the Qur'an'. For an exegetical defence of the Christian notion of the imputation of Adam's sin to the rest of humanity, see Murray, 'The Imputation of Adam's Sin'.

6 Westphal, 'Taking St. Paul Seriously', p. 200.

7 Westphal, 'Taking St. Paul Seriously', pp. 209–10.

In his argument that sin be taken seriously in epistemology, Westphal has pointed us to a seminal passage in the New Testament that affirms both the universality of sin, as well as (some of) sin's epistemological implications. We could spend the rest of our time on this passage, but we will have to be content to highlight a few key points here.⁸ In Romans 1:18–25, quoted by Westphal, the Word of God says this:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

This argument, beginning in 1:18, actually carries right through to Chapter Three. In Chapter Three, the conclusion to the argument is given. It is that '*both Jews and Greeks, are under sin*' (3:9), so that '*all have sinned* and fall short of the glory of God' (3:23). There is, then, a universal context to this passage in Romans 1:18–25. Since it is revelation given to all by God and through all of creation, it will naturally include everyone. This passage is the *locus classicus* for what has been called the *sensus divinitatis*, or 'sense of divinity' that all people have. This *sensus* has a surfeit of epistemological implications. We can highlight a few.

First, the reason that we will, each and every one of us, be inexcusable before God is that we all know God by way of creational revelation. As the Psalmist puts it, 'night to night reveals *knowledge*' (Ps. 19:2). This revelation should prompt us to honour God and to give thanks (Romans 1:21). Instead, since we remain the 'image of God', as sinners (FIG), we seek, in our sinfulness, to suppress what we know. This knowledge of God

8 For a more thorough discussion of this passage, see Oliphint, 'Covenantal Epistemology'; Oliphint, 'The Irrationality of Unbelief'.

that we all have is knowledge that comes to us, not because we deduce it from aspects of creation, or because we all make the proper inferences; it is knowledge that we have because 'we clearly perceive' this revelation (Romans 1:20). And we clearly perceive this revelation because 'God has shown it' to us (Romans 1:19). In other words, God's revelation in and through creation is, in an important sense, pre-cognitive. God implants it in each of us, so that all who are in His image will know Him.

It might be asked: how may we classify this knowledge of God that is implanted in us by God Himself? And what is its justification? To the first question, perhaps Bertrand Russell might help us. In his essay 'Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description', Russell has explained the former in this way:

I say that I am acquainted with an object when I have a direct cognitive relation to that object, i.e., when I am directly aware of the object itself. When I speak of a cognitive relation here, I do not mean the sort of relation which constitutes judgment, but the sort which constitutes *presentation*. That is, to say that S has acquaintance with O is essentially the same thing as to say that O is *presented* to S.⁹

And elsewhere Russell has said the following:

The main consideration is undoubtedly to be derived from remembering what '*presence*' actually is. When an object is *in my present experience*, then I am acquainted with it; it is not necessary for me to reflect upon my experience, or to observe that the object has the property of belonging to my experience, in order to be acquainted with it, but, on the contrary, the object itself is known to me without the need of any reflection on my part as to its properties or relations.¹⁰

Without detailing or adopting all of the implications of Russell's categories, the notion that knowledge comes by way of presence seems to be consistent with what Scripture is telling us about God's creational revelation. Given God's omnipresence, together with His continual activity of revealing Himself in and through all that He has made, the knowledge of God which all people possess could be analogous to Russell's knowledge by acquaintance.¹¹

9 Russell, *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays*, p. 148 (my emphases).

10 Russell, *Logic and Knowledge Essays*, p. 167 (my emphases).

11 This appears to me, at least initially, to be similar to the argument in Yazdani, 'An Internalist Model of Immediate Awareness of God from an Islamic Philosophy Perspective'.

Perhaps also, in terms of the justification of this knowledge, and in addition to the Russellian notion of 'acquaintance' and 'presence', we could incorporate into this Christian or covenantal epistemology elements of Michael Huemer's 'direct realism'. Again, without adopting the details of his approach – coined by him as 'phenomenal conservatism' – we can affirm that, as creatures made in God's image, we do indeed have what Huemer has called an 'apprehension' of the things of God's creation. For Huemer, an apprehension is an 'assertive mental state'.¹² Coupled with this mental state, according to Huemer, is an object that satisfies the content of our apprehension. Huemer has noted that 'there is a (nondeviant) causal chain between the object satisfying the perceptual experience and the experience itself'.¹³ Somehow, there is a causal activity that connects the object to my experience.

At this point – the point of the 'causal chain' – a Christian-theistic epistemology can perhaps give an account of the connection between our apprehensions and the objects themselves. The question could be asked, for example, to Huemer: 'What kind of causality, or causal chain, is found in your direct realism?' If we take Aristotle's four categories as possible responses, it seems the only viable candidate for Huemer is that the objects of our apprehensions are either material causes or perhaps formal causes. For Huemer, in other words, there seems to be nothing 'dynamic' in the objects, or otherwise animating the objects themselves. The causality, in this case, would seem to be located somehow in our experience.

For a Christian-theistic epistemology, however, we have already seen that the objects of creation are, as a matter of fact, not simply material and objective but are, as well, revelational. That is, the very presence of God in and through all of creation, together with the dynamic of His revealing activity in all He has made, automatically and dynamically 'connect' the object to the subject. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, both object and subject are themselves revelational of God, and so they are 'linked' by virtue of what God is doing in and through His world.

Only in this way are we able to introduce into the knowledge situation a transcendent criterion of connection. God, who transcends all He has made, also brings together all He has made according to His sovereign plan. Part of that plan, as we saw when we looked at creation, includes that His human creatures know Him (IG), and thus know His world. Our very existence, therefore, begins with knowledge that God Himself dynamically gives to us. We do not begin only with beliefs (as is the case in almost all analytic philosophy) and attempt to show how or if those beliefs can be

12 Huemer, *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, p. 79.

13 Huemer, *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, pp. 79–80.

‘converted’ to knowledge. We begin, as self-conscious human beings, with our true knowledge of God, given to us by our knowledge of the world.

Herman Bavinck, representative of historic Reformed Theology, has recognised that this knowledge of God, given by God, is inextricably linked to our self-consciousness:

The core of our self-consciousness is, as Schleiermacher perceived much more clearly than Kant, not autonomy, but a feeling of dependence. In the act of becoming conscious of ourselves we become conscious of ourselves as creatures [. . .] We feel ourselves dependent on everything around us; we are not alone.¹⁴

A further and important epistemological point is entailed by the *sensus divinitatis*. Given that we know God ‘in the things that have been made’ (Romans 1:20), we must, necessarily, know ‘the things that have been made’. In other words, our knowledge of God is not something abstracted from creation but is embedded in the very fabric of creation itself. That is why the Psalmist says that it is ‘the heavens’ that declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1). In order to recognise that declaration of God’s glory, we recognise, simultaneously, ‘the heavens’ that declare that glory. That is to say, in knowing God through creation, we also, in one simultaneous epistemological ‘moment’, as it were, know creation itself.

It is the presence of God, in His revealing activity, that guarantees this knowledge. We need not reflect on our experience or observe that the object has the property of belonging to my experience in order to know it. There is no reflection, certainly no inference, needed in order to know by ‘acquaintance’ – that is, by God’s active presence. We know because God is actively present in and through His creation, all the while revealing Himself, day and night, to those made in His image.

Hence, not only our self-consciousness, but also our knowledge of the world itself is dependent on God’s own revelatory activity. Since we know God in and through the things He has made, we know the things He has made in our knowing of Him. There is an inextricable link between our knowledge of the phenomena in the world and our knowledge of God.¹⁵ Thus, for example, as George Marsden has argued, it is not sufficient to attempt to ground ‘common knowledge’ in some notion of common-sense realism.¹⁶

14 Quoted in Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, ‘*Gevoel* and Illumination’, p. 5. In order to connect Bavinck’s view to the history of Christianity, Sutanto has gone on to show the similarities between Bavinck’s understanding of our God-consciousness and that of Augustine and Bonaventure.

15 See Sutanto, ‘*Gevoel* and Illumination’, p. 6.

16 See Marsden, ‘The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia’.

Something more foundational, more universal, is needed. What is needed is universal knowledge, which the Lord Himself provides by way of the *sensus*.

One philosopher who has made much of the *sensus divinitatis* as an epistemological category is Alvin Plantinga. In the final book of his 'Warrant' trilogy,¹⁷ *Warranted Christian Belief*, Plantinga argues that the *sensus divinitatis* should be included as a necessary component of properly functioning epistemic faculties. Having quoted Romans 1:18–20 and select passages from Calvin, Plantinga tells us just exactly how he understands the *sensus divinitatis*:

The *sensus divinitatis* is a disposition or set of dispositions to form theistic beliefs in various circumstances, in response to the sorts of conditions or stimuli that trigger the working of this sense of divinity.¹⁸

Furthermore, says Plantinga, the *sensus divinitatis* is, in some important respects, innate.¹⁹ According to Plantinga, it is likely not innate in that knowledge of God is present from birth, but rather that the capacity for such knowledge is present from birth.

Here the *sensus divinitatis* resembles other belief-producing faculties or mechanisms. If we wish to think in terms of the overworked functional analogy, we can think of the *sensus divinitatis*, too, as an input-output device: it takes [...] circumstances [...] as input and issues as output theistic belief, beliefs about God.²⁰

And, so notes Plantinga, 'failure to believe in God is a result of some kind of dysfunction of the *sensus divinitatis*'.²¹ With full appreciation for Plantinga's massive contribution to a Christian epistemology, we can recognise that his proper affirmation of the *sensus divinitatis* as an epistemological category does not go quite far enough. In the above quote, Plantinga attributes a failure to believe in God to a 'dysfunction of the *sensus divinitatis*'. However, in Scripture (and in Calvin) the problem of sin's effects on our knowledge does not impinge on the *sensus divinitatis per se*. That is, because the *sensus* is implanted in us by God, and because it is God who manifests Himself in and through all that is made, we inevitably as image of God (IG)

17 Besides *Warranted Christian Belief*, the trilogy includes Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, and Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*.

18 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 173.

19 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 173.

20 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 174–75.

21 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 184.

possess true knowledge of God. There is no hint in Scripture's description of the *sensus* that it is a mere capacity, or that it is simply a 'belief-producing' mechanism. Instead, the *sensus* is entailed in what it means to be the image of God (IG) and, thus, is itself, always and everywhere, 'properly functioning' in its capacity to produce in us a true knowledge of God.

As we see in the quotation from Romans 1 above, the epistemological problem that enters, given the *sensus*, is not with the *sensus* itself, but instead is focused on what we, in our sins, do with the knowledge of God implanted in us. Although we do not have space to develop this theme, we should recognise that the reason given for God's wrath (Romans 1:18) is that we, in our sin and unrighteousness, suppress the truth that God makes known to us. Importantly, this is a clear affirmation that those who remain in their sins and who continue to act in unrighteousness nevertheless know the truth. It is the 'truth' that one 'holds down', not some personal opinion or belief. In holding down the knowledge of God, we also hold down the transcendent meaning and source of the world that God has made, and over which He alone is sovereign. And we hold down the most important aspect of any fact that we claim to know – that is, we know what we know because of who God is and what He does in and through us, and through the facts themselves.

It may be useful to point out at this juncture at least one attempt to incorporate Plantinga's Proper Functionalism into an Islamic context. In his article titled 'An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology', Jamie B. Turner has offered a view in some ways similar to Plantinga's and to the Biblical notion of the *sensus divinitatis*. Turner has argued for the following thesis:

That if Islam is true, then:

1. God as the Creator of the universe has instilled within human beings different cognitive faculties in order that they may acquire true beliefs about Him.
2. God created all of humankind upon an innate natural constitution (*fiṭra*). This *fiṭra* urges them to recognise Him, to know Him, and to worship Him alone.
3. The *fiṭra* has been set to work in tandem with other cognitive faculties for the production of beliefs; such faculties include, particularly in the context of theistic belief, the *heart* (*qalb*). When one's *fiṭra* functions properly, it 'triggers' within the heart an immediate awareness of God. This awareness arises within the intuition of the heart by the natural workings of the *fiṭra* upon it.
4. The proper function of these faculties, which produces basic awareness of God, typically arises from one's direct experience

of the many 'signs' (*āyāt*) that God has placed within the world, which allows one to experience knowledge of Him in a basic manner. This knowledge of God comes to one in the basic sense in that it is immediate and involuntary.

5. Therefore, through the epistemic role of the *fiṭra* in connection with the heart, upon the apprehension of God's distinct 'signs', belief in Him is reached immediately without the need for inference or propositional evidence.²²

It is easy to see, given these five tenets, that a certain view of Islamic epistemology might be conformable to a Plantingan Proper Functional-ist approach.²³ The primary means by which the *fiṭra* operates is through divine 'signs':

On the Taymiyyan model as I have outlined it, a sign of the divine – such as my own existence, grasped by the proper functioning of the heart and *fiṭrah* – produces the basic belief that there must be a maker of me and of the world as a whole.²⁴

Theistic/Islamic belief *p* can come to person *S* in an immediate or basic way through the proper workings of the *fiṭrah* upon the heart, *via* one's apprehension of God's signs.²⁵

Turner then completes his epistemological picture with the following:

1. Just as God has made available an immediate apprehension of His existence by reference to His 'signs' in the external world, so, too, has He permitted more intimate knowledge of Him through 'signs' in the form of His revelation.
2. Through an apprehension of these 'signs' that are 'read and understood', human beings are able to understand the truth of God's revelation in a basic manner and, consequently, the truth of His religion and the purpose He has in store for them.
3. Human beings are able to know that these 'signs' are God's words written as a message to humankind and that Islam is the religion of God to be followed by all. This immediate belief arises through the natural workings of the *fiṭra* in conjunction with the heart in an

22 Turner, 'An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology', p. 775.

23 Turner has noted that he is taking his inspiration from Ibn Taymiyya's epistemology, although the approach he has taken in this article is his own. See Turner, 'An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology', p. 775.

24 Turner, 'An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology', p. 781.

25 Turner, 'An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology', p. 784.

immediate fashion upon apprehension of these 'signs' (that is, the verses of the Qur'an).

4. Therefore, full-fledged Islamic belief can be grasped in an immediate and basic way according to this model, in accordance with the design plan upon which God has created human beings.²⁶

Thus, Turner has argued that not simply theism, but specifically Islamic theism is warranted by way of Plantinga's Proper Functionalism model. Even given Turner's conformity to a Plantingian epistemology, however, questions remain. It is not completely perspicuous why everyone is not an Islamic believer, given the immediacy of the '*fiṭra* + signs' pair. In other words, just exactly why, given the immediacy of the *fiṭra* together with the 'signs', do people still fail to believe in God? As far as I can tell, Turner seems to think that the central problem is located in one's uncooperative 'environment'. That is, '[i]f the surrounding environment does not corrupt this disposition, the human being will acquire certain beliefs intuitively. It is only as a result of one's external environment that one can be taken away from this naturally inclined path'.²⁷

It appears, then, that one's environment can corrupt the proper functioning of the epistemological pair of '*fiṭra* + signs'. This, it would seem, would lead to the curious conclusion that the main reason, perhaps even the only reason, that one is not a follower of Islam is due to one's environment. It is the environment that has somehow impinged on the proper function of the *fiṭra* and has damaged the heart so that the 'signs' are not seen for what they are; thus, Islamic belief is absent. If this is true, then surely the lack of Islamic belief cannot be blamed on the unbeliever himself. It appears that the unbeliever's faculties remain intact, save for adverse environmental effects. This, we should recognise, is one result of a weak view of sin's effects.

For the Christian, this is where (FIG) enters our epistemology. According to Scripture, there is much more at work than simply environmental factors when it comes to our lack of acknowledgment of the truth within us. Because of our sin, we suppress or hold down that truth that God gives. Not only do we seek to wipe it out of our consciousness, but we actively and rebelliously 'exchange the truth of God for a lie', and in so doing we 'worship and serve' something created, rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25).

Suppose, for example, that humanity is created by God as male and female. The history of all Abrahamic religions has held this to be true for thousands of years. Not only so, but society generally has held the distinction of male and female to be a kind of 'common-sense' principle for almost the entirety of human history. Orthodox Christianity maintains this

26 Turner, 'An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology', p. 783.

27 Turner, 'An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology', p. 777.

as a basic truth of human identity – we are, by God’s design, created in the image of God as either male or female.

But suppose also, given (FIG), that we determine to suppress the knowledge of God by denying what God reveals to us in His creation. Suppose we assume all of history to be seriously errant in this regard and to argue that our gender is what we determine it to be. What might be the result? Albeit virtually inconceivable historically, the contemporary result would be that our gender is determined, not by God’s creative act, but by what we ourselves decide, using criteria that we ourselves have established. In other words, we assert in the strongest way our individual autonomy. This is a prime, relevant example of what ‘suppression of the truth’ looks like in our current context. Such suppression, however, cannot be coherently maintained.²⁸ Thus, there is, at least, an epistemological problem afoot, a problem which itself, for Christianity, entails an ethical problem as well. It is a problem that stems from (FIG) as a universal condition.

To put this in Christian vernacular, since the fall into sin, all people continue in their covenant relation to God. However, because of our sin, we remain, in Adam, ‘covenant-breakers’. That is, we are not able to keep the perfect law of God perfectly. And, where there is one transgression of the law, the entire law is transgressed (James 2:10). As covenant creatures who have broken God’s law, we are unacceptable to God until and unless our guilt is covered. A holy God cannot live with unholiness, and no amount of repentance and good works can make us holy, once we are guilty – much more is needed. More on this below.

The *sensus divinitatis*, therefore, amounts to this: human beings are, in the first place, as covenant creatures, knowing agents (IG) who seek, in our unrighteousness, to hold down and suppress the truth that we actually know (FIG) because of what God does in and through us. In this sense, Aristotle had it about right: ‘All men naturally desire to know’.²⁹ We are, at root, knowers. We are not simply believers, ‘opiners’, or ‘constant seekers of knowledge’. As the image of God, (IG), even as (FIG), we know God; our self-consciousness coincides with our God-consciousness.

The epistemological implication of sin, therefore, is that we ‘disconnect’ from the very source of knowledge itself, God. We know Him, but we refuse to acknowledge what we know. And we know Him through the world He has made, but we refuse to acknowledge Him as the creator and sustainer of that world. So, we ‘take’ His facts, and we pretend it is we who need to interpret them and give them meaning. Knowledge, in that sense, becomes a purely subjective and relative endeavour. In various ways and by various

28 Arguments for this incoherence cannot be given here, but see, for example, Bogardus, ‘Evaluating Arguments for the Sex/Gender Distinction’.

29 Greek text from Aristotle, ‘Aristotle’s Metaphysics’, vol. 1, p. 1; English translation from Aristotle, *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, vol. 17, p. 1.

sinful means, we 'lose touch' with the world as it truly is. Thus, we lose touch with a viable epistemology.

Salvation as an Epistemological Category

For Reformed Christians, sin is a deadly disease. It affects every aspect of who we are as human beings. It renders all our faculties spiritually dead, including our cognitive faculties. Thus, it is not possible for anyone who remains a slave to sin to have cognitive faculties that function properly. Our cognitive faculties remain hostile to God, unwilling and unable to submit to Him (Romans 8:6–8). It is not possible to please God in such a state of sin, not even by virtue of what we claim to know. Because, as we have seen, whatever we claim to know has its foundation in the knowledge of God suppressed, and thus we take what God graciously gives and we distort it, pervert it, subvert it and attempt to bury it. What we claim to know, therefore, is itself condemnable before God. We know by virtue of our rebellion; thus, we fail to know what and as we ought to know.

But all is not lost. Just as creation in God's image (IG) is an epistemological category, and just as sin is an epistemological category (FIG), so also should salvation be seen to constitute an epistemological category. For now, we will simply stipulate that, as Christian faith in Jesus Christ is the evident initiation of one's salvation, hence:

- For every person who trusts in Christ S_1 , $S_1 \rightarrow (RIG)$

That is, for every person who trusts in Christ, the image of God (IG), once fallen due to sin (FIG), is renewed (RIG) in them.³⁰

In this context, we can take advantage of certain aspects of the Proper Functionalism of Alvin Plantinga. Specifically, since (RIG) entails the renewal of our cognitive faculties,³¹ we can adapt Plantinga's 'extended A/C model'³² to (RIG) but with a caveat or two, given our discussion thus far.

30 It is likely the notion of 'redemption' that most explicitly divides religions. For an Islamic perspective, see Chittick, 'Worship'. For Islam, being in a right relationship to God is something that we are able, in and of ourselves, to produce. For Reformed Christians, God must regenerate the heart before there can be the exercise of Biblical faith.

31 We should note here that renewed cognitive faculties are not restored cognitive faculties, in that the influence of sin still remains; 'proper function' is not perfect function. However, (RIG) is a definitive reversal of (FIG) in that the former alone can be said to function properly.

32 See Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 198–237. For Plantinga, the extended A/C model provides the warrant, not just of theistic belief, but of specifically Christian belief, via the tripartite categories of Christian faith, Scripture and the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. All three of these would be categories, unlike the categories included in Plantinga's discussion of warranted theistic belief, unavailable to other religions.

First, the caveats. As we have noted above, since the *sensus* is true knowledge and not merely the capacity for true knowledge, Plantinga's 'Reidian' epistemology is insufficient as a foundation for knowledge.³³ Given Plantinga's incisive and decisive critiques of classical foundationalism generally,³⁴ and given the insufficiency of a 'Reidian' approach to foundationalism, it appears that any version of foundationalism needs either to be substantially revised or scrapped altogether. Since foundationalism is defined by its 'basic belief/inferred belief' structure, there is no room in the inn for a basic, universal and foundational true knowledge, which, as we have seen, is intrinsic to what it means to be the image of God.

The second caveat is like unto the first. Since it is the case that (IG) in all its forms includes true knowledge of God, universally and through all time, any and every belief that we have must be measured, at least in part, according to the 'plumb line' of that knowledge. That is, the knowledge of God, given universally, dynamically, in and through all that is made, must become the primary standard by which all other knowledge and beliefs are assessed.

And this takes us directly to our topic in this section. The reason that salvation must be included as an epistemological category is because, given (FIG), a person S is unable properly to assess the knowledge situation apart from (RIG). If, in other words, we were originally made as good and upright knowers of God (IG), and if, given the universal pervasiveness of sin, we refuse to acknowledge that knowledge and instead suppress and exchange it for lies (FIG), then it follows that only a renewal of (IG) will suffice for properly functioning epistemic faculties.

The first epistemic category of Plantinga's tripartite distinction is 'faith'.³⁵ Note the following:

Faith therefore involves an explicitly cognitive element; it is, says Calvin, *knowledge* – knowledge of the availability of redemption and salvation through the person and work of Jesus Christ – and it is revealed to our minds. To have faith, therefore, is to know and hence *believe* something or other.³⁶

That is to say, the first evidential aspect of (RIG) is that we profess, confess and believe in or (as Scripture is wont to put it in the Greek) 'into' the Lord

33 Plantinga has said that his approach to Proper Functionalism is 'broadly Reidian'. See Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. x.

34 See Plantinga, *Warrant*.

35 I will not be able to develop Plantinga's tripartite categories here. For an elaboration of these categories as epistemological criteria, see Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, Chapter Eight.

36 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 201.

Jesus Christ.³⁷ Our believing, in other words, is not simply or only a belief-that, but it is a belief that is transformative, uniting us to Christ Himself. Thus, as transformative, it is a belief that includes, even presupposes, the true knowledge of God in Christ.³⁸

It is this faith (which includes knowledge) that sets our sights, not on the suppression of the true knowledge of God as in (FIG), but on the acknowledgement and illumination of that knowledge. To have faith in Christ is to see, for the first time, that the world we have taken as ‘natural’ is actually the world that God has made and in which He is present and actively revealing Himself. To put it in Biblical categories, the world that we ‘sensed’ as blind beggars, is now fully ‘seen’ in all of its Christian-theistic glory (see, for example, John 9:39). As the Christian hymn puts it:

Heaven above is softer blue,
 Earth around is sweeter green;
Something lives in every hue
Christless eyes have never seen:
 Birds with gladder songs o’erflow,
 Flow’rs with deeper beauties shine,
 Since I know, as now I know,
 I am His, and He is mine.³⁹

As Plantinga rightly argues, however, this kind of faith – this knowing kind of believing – is not self-generated. It is not an epistemic quality that can be conjured up by sheer intellectual effort. It is, instead, given to us by and through the work of the Holy Spirit. Just as the *sensus* is implanted in us by God, and so is a gift from Him for which we will be held accountable, so also is this faith, which issues forth as (RIG), a gift from God’s Spirit. But the Spirit of God does not do His work in a vacuum. He does His work by way of the third category that Plantinga affirms – that is, Holy Scripture.⁴⁰

37 The New Testament uses the ‘believe into’ Jesus Christ construction a total of fifty-nine times. It is a strange construction in the Greek language and is designed to highlight the notion that faith in Christ is substantially more than a mere doxastic act.

38 That is, if this were a belief in need of further justification or warrant, it would remain at the level of mere opinion and would be entirely or mostly subjective. Given its epistemic foundation in knowledge, however, this (Christian) kind of believing entails our assent and trust in that which we believe (and know).

39 A hymn by George Wade Robinson. See <https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/284> (accessed 31 January 2024).

40 For Protestants, the books of the Bible are those listed in Chapter One of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. As that chapter goes on to affirm in Section Four, since the Bible is the very Word of God, it is self-authenticating. Thus, the Bible occupies a principal status for the Christian.

These last two categories – the testimony of the Holy Spirit and Holy Scripture – can, according to Plantinga, be included more broadly as testimony. Testimony, so Plantinga argues, should be seen by us as epistemically basic. There is much that we learn (when we are children growing up, for example) and much that we claim to know that has come to us by way of testimony. If we were to include all testimonial beliefs that we have as themselves in need of justification in order for us to know them, there would be no end to the epistemic process of justification for us. Instead, we rightly depend on testimony for much of what we know.

To be clear, the testimony that we have, subjectively through the Holy Spirit and objectively through Holy Scripture, is not simply ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ testimony. In both cases, the testimony is ‘supernatural’. But its supernatural status does not negate its epistemic value. To the contrary, it enhances that value, given that what comes from God cannot be in any way malign or adversative. Thus, (RIG) is, we could say, the eschatological fulfillment of the epistemological process. It is where humanity is meant to be, given (IG) and (FIG). Without (RIG), we are left with the confusing and chaotic effects of (FIG), which will never provide the epistemological roots that we need for our knowledge to be planted in rich and nutritious soil.

Conclusion

Therefore, from (IG) to (FIG) and then to (RIG), a Christian-theistic epistemology reaches its *terminus*, as might be expected, in the salvation of those whose cognitive processes include faith in Jesus Christ, as well as the testimony of Scripture and the Holy Spirit. With these in place, we see the fulfillment of what our cognitive faculties were meant to be, from the point of creation on.

One final point should be mentioned. Even with (RIG), sin still remains and can have deleterious effects on our cognitive faculties. Salvation is not perfection. However, since the tripartite application of faith, Scripture and the Holy Spirit releases us from our slavery to sin (FIG), our cognitive eyes are indeed opened, even if we have yet to attain complete vision. In that way, we have what we need, in principle, for the construction of a complete epistemological theory. Apart from that tripartite application, according to Christian-theism, (FIG) will render us unable properly to account for what we claim to know.

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PART V

Islamic Epistemology Today: Disciplinary, Scriptural and Social Discourses

CHAPTER 13

Advice for Muslim Epistemologists

Kelly James Clark

Consternation

After accepting the invitation to speak on Muslim epistemology, it quickly occurred to me that I know nothing about Muslim epistemology. I know lots of Muslims and lots of epistemologists but next to nothing about their intersection. Moreover, I am keenly aware that, if I were to claim that ‘al-Ghazālī says *p*’ and ‘Ibn Sīnā says *q*’, much better-trained Islamic scholars will tell me that actually al-Ghazālī denies *p* and Ibn Sīnā rejects *q*; and that would be the end of that. I am quite sure that this would be true also of any claims I would make about Ibn ‘Arabī, al-Kindī, Rumi and every other Muslim philosopher. Therefore, I decided: I would not discuss Muslim philosophers at all.

I also thought that I better not talk about Muslim philosophy and Islamic thought in general. As an anti-essentialist about religion, I do not think the category ‘Muslim philosophy’ has a unique referent. After all, there are countless Muslims (representing often vastly different conceptions of Islam) who have had countless theological thoughts, and the intersection of those thoughts is likely the empty set. Even if I were to restrict myself to, say, ‘orthodox Muslims’ and ‘thought-written-down’ – that is, to ‘proper’ Muslims who wrote texts designated as ‘philosophical’ – I suspect that any claims thusly grounded would be rejected by a great many contemporary Muslim thinkers. Restricting myself to epistemology: I am quite certain that there is no consensus in Muslim philosophy or Islamic thought on epistemological principles. While I have often heard, ‘Muslims are evidentialists’, I have also heard of remarkable exceptions. Hence, I shall not be making any claims about Islam, Muslims, Islamic philosophy, or Islamic epistemological thought *in toto*. It is better for me not to speak of any claims of Muslim philosophers or Islamic thought at all.

You might sense my desperation. How can a Christian epistemologist who has determined at the outset not to discuss any Muslim philosophers, Muslim philosophy or Islamic thought offer any meaningful advice

to Muslim epistemologists? As I read more of the invitation to participate in this project, I saw its promise: 'A historic opportunity for developing Islamic epistemology as a contemporary academic discourse'. That fixed my inspiration. How can I help my Muslim brothers and sisters engage in contemporary academic epistemological discourse?

I am quite sure, and I do not mean this as a criticism, that current practices by most contemporary Muslim scholars (at least the ones whom I know) preclude developing Islamic epistemology as a contemporary academic discourse. Let me be more precise – I think I understand how the current practices of most Muslim scholars preclude their engagement by contemporary non-Muslim epistemologists. Most contemporary Muslim philosophers align themselves with a thinker or a tradition, taking on the modes of discourse particular to that thinker and tradition. But contemporary epistemology is more idea than tradition-focused; its methods are more logical and conceptual than historical. Since contemporary Muslim philosophy is often more concerned with history and tradition than conceptual analysis, one may ask: how can contemporary Muslim philosophers mine their various traditions for insights and communicate them effectively to contemporary academics?

Thus, my advice to Muslim philosophers aims at what it might mean for a Muslim scholar to understand and participate in 'contemporary academic discourse'. I know this is, in one sense, 'academic writing 101'. In another sense, it is a concession to the fact that many philosophy PhD programmes do not teach writing. They seem to think that writing is caught (since not taught). When I am involved in projects that teach writing to advanced graduate students and early-career philosophers, I am often told: 'Well, they never taught us that in grad school. This is so helpful'. In the spirit of helpfulness, I will outline, as questions, the broadest issues involved in Muslim engagement in contemporary academic discourse – the 'what', the 'who' and the 'why'. I will conclude with a brief reflection on what being a creature might mean for epistemology.

What?

Let us start with the 'what'. Before any writing begins, authors need compelling answers to the following two questions: (1) What exactly is your thesis? And (2) does it contribute something interestingly new to the current debates? Let us start with the first.

(1) What exactly is your thesis?

It may seem obvious that a philosophical paper of any sort, let alone one which contributes to contemporary debates, should have a clear thesis.

Yet often I cannot locate a clear thesis in drafts of papers that I am asked to read. Let me be very clear: at the end of the first or second paragraph (maybe later on in the introduction, if the author is really clever and has a really good reason) there should be a single, clear, declarative sentence that begins with ‘In this paper, I will argue . . .’, which says, clearly and unambiguously, what the author will argue.

I sometimes get to the end of the first paragraph and then to the end of the second and the third, all the way to the end of the introduction, and I have no idea what the point of the paper is. It can get worse. I have read entire papers where there is no thesis statement anywhere; I get all the way to the end and have no idea what the point of the paper was. I suspect you have, too!

If I cannot locate a clear thesis, I often ask: ‘Would you please tell me – in a single sentence – what your thesis is?’ Authors often launch into a long, unfocused discourse on all of the things they have written, which I have just read, maybe giving more background to the general topic, to no discernible point; I will stop them and say: ‘No, one sentence. One simple, declarative sentence where you say, “I will argue that . . .”’ I ask them to take a second, write it down, share it. Then it dawns, the author has no idea what the point of all their rhetoric is.

Thus, I encourage the author to start over, to start where every paper should start – with a clear sense of the paper’s point. Frankly, I find it vastly easier to write a paper if I know what my thesis is! Knowing your thesis at the outset directs research, guides arguments and aids in writing. Without a thesis, a paper simply rambles and jumbles and tumbles.

***(2) Does your thesis contribute something interestingly
new to the current debates?***

Of course, not just any thesis will do. If you want to be part of the ‘historic opportunity for developing Islamic epistemology as a contemporary academic discourse’, your thesis will need to engage topics in contemporary academic epistemological discourse. Unless you are Keith Lehrer, Bertrand Russell, or Roderick Chisholm, your topic should not be ‘epistemology’ or ‘knowledge’. If you cannot think of a more specific topic, or if you do not know who Lehrer, Russell and Chisholm are, you are probably not yet prepared to contribute to the current debate. After all, debates have histories that contribute to and even determine both focused topics and accepted modes of discourse. Lehrer, Russell and Chisholm, major contributors to twentieth-century epistemology, need to be mastered for both contemporary topics and modes of discourse. They have wrestled with foundationalism, coherentism, reliabilism, the Gettier problem and the myth of the given (among many other topics). You cannot be part of the current debate

until *you* have wrestled with Lehrer, Russell and Chisholm on foundationalism, coherentism, reliabilism, the Gettier problem and the myth of the given (among many other topics). Imagine trying to contribute to contemporary physics without mastering the topics and mathematical methods of Einstein, Bohr and Schrödinger. Likewise, you cannot contribute to contemporary epistemology unless you master the topics and the logical and conceptual methods of contemporary epistemologists.

Some readers may think that Lehrer, Russell and Chisholm are 'so yesterday'. And they would be right. The work of those thinkers led to, again among many others, Linda Zagzebski, Jennifer Nagel and Jennifer Lackey (highlighting the contributions of outstanding women). And they, in turn, explored new topics: Bayesian epistemology, virtue epistemology, knowledge-first epistemology, alief and belief, disagreement, testimony and countless other topics. In order to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past – of trying to revive, for example, moribund epistemologies such as classical foundationalism or coherentism – Muslim thinkers who wish to be taken seriously in the contemporary context need to be fully conversant with twentieth- and twenty-first-century epistemological debates.

I suspect that Muslims who wish to be epistemologists might have more interest in religious epistemology than epistemology *simpliciter*. But you cannot do excellent contemporary religious epistemology unless and until you are deeply conversant in contemporary epistemology *simpliciter*. Consider the work of just three of the twentieth century's great religious epistemologists: Alvin Plantinga, William Alston and Nicholas Wolterstorff. Each of them mastered and then advanced debates in contemporary epistemology at its highest levels before entering into discussion of the rationality of belief in God. Alston, for example, published his ground-breaking book *Divine Nature and Human Language* (1989) long after his *Philosophy of Language* (1964). Plantinga advanced his non-argument religious epistemology (1983) after grappling with theistic arguments (1967), whereas his work on modality preceded his work on the problem of evil (both published in 1974). Wolterstorff's work on Locke and the ethics of belief (1996) anticipated his development of the ideas and relevance of Thomas Reid for contemporary epistemology (2004). And all the above figured into Plantinga's thinking as he wrote his three-volume series on warrant (1993 and 2000). Plantinga, Alston and Wolterstorff entered into and advanced our understanding of rationality-justification-warrant, Thomas Reid, internalism-externalism, classical foundationalism, *de facto versus de jure* objections, defeaters, *prima facie versus ultima facie* justification and Proper Functionalism.

Therefore, developing a thesis that contributes something interestingly new to the current debates in religious epistemology, which have advanced beyond Plantinga, Alston and Wolterstorff, requires mastering Lehrer, Russell, Chisholm, on the one hand, and Plantinga, Alston and Wolterstorff,

on the other – and all of the related concepts, arguments and assumptions. And, if you had three hands, moving on to Zagzebski, Lackey and Nagel (among many others) and their insights and inspirations.

If this sounds daunting, and it should, then imagine my trepidation when asked to write a paper in Islamic epistemology. The entry requirements to understanding a single Muslim thinker, say al-Ghazālī, are astonishingly high, requiring years of instruction in al-Ghazālī's writings, pre-Ghazālīan thinkers, al-Ghazālī's history and personality, al-Ghazālī's milieu, Arabic, Aristotle and 1,000 years of commentary on his ideas. How could I possibly think that I, lacking such an education, could develop a thesis that contributes anything interestingly new to Ghazālīan discussions? I greatly admire historical philosophical scholars, in part because they endured daunting entry requirements to contribute to their field. Contemporary epistemology has very different but no less daunting entry requirements. It may take a generational shift for Muslim scholars to begin acquiring the skills necessary to contribute to current debates in epistemology. I will discuss why after covering 'who'.

Who?

If Muslim academics would like to see Islamic thought taken seriously in contemporary academic debates, they must accommodate their scholarship to their audience. After setting a thesis, any writer must determine their target audience. There are countless audiences, almost as many as there are people and 'people groups', and the skilled writer adapts her paper to her audience. I often ask authors: 'So, who is your audience for this paper?' Yet I too often read drafts of papers by scholars of all stripes that are either audience-insensitive or audience-unaware.

One of my audiences is the general public. When it is, I avoid using any technical philosophical jargon. I spend a lot more time showing rather than telling (illustrating rather than declaiming or arguing). I use short, simple declarative sentences. I assume the vocabulary and education of, say, juniors in high school. For example, I wrote the following for the *Huffington Post*:

Why don't moderate Muslims denounce terrorism?

They do. But it doesn't make the news. Bad news, such as terrorist attacks, is news. Good news is not.

Let me concede: just as there are perversions of Christianity (the KKK and the Crusades), there are perversions of Islam (ISIS and Al-Qaeda). Each of these perversions can claim legitimation for their views within their Holy Writ and tradition. And, so, such views can claim to be Christian or Islamic. Taken as sacred, such views can inspire followers to unspeakable acts of violence.

But just as followers of Jesus claim (rightly, so it seems to me) that Christianity, properly understood, opposes slavery, most wars, and the wholesale slaughter of Jews and Muslims in the Holy Land, so, too, followers of Muhammad claim (rightly, so it seems to me) that Islam, properly understood, opposes radicalisation, offensive warfare and terrorism.¹

I wrote more, of course, but I want the academic reader of this article to see that good philosophical writing needs to identify its audience clearly and then write to them/it – that is, use modes of discourse that successfully communicate to that audience. You might wonder where the philosophy is in this blog. Because going into the details would detract from the point, let me just state that in those few paragraphs I have communicated, without philosophical jargon, much of what I have learned in the past two decades in cognitive science, religion and violence, rhetoric, Qur’anic studies and theology. The blog was on the front page of the *Huffington Post* for more than twenty-four hours and was read by millions.

Audience-identification, of course, requires a great deal of audience-understanding and, then, author-accommodation to the modes of discourse and understanding of one’s audience. Let me commend writing to the general public to at least some Muslim scholars. It is a discipline which the philosophical community owes its various publics.

Failures of audience-identification abound in academic papers. Suppose, for example, an author reads a paper on Heidegger to philosophers in general. Perhaps that author has learned a lot from Heidegger and is excited to share what she has learned with the philosophical community at large. Yet, as can happen with specialists, she fails at accommodating to her audience by assuming that modes of discourse that are familiar to Heidegger scholars are, with just a little tweaking, accessible to philosophers in general. Hence, throughout her paper, she drops such linguistic gems as *Dasein*, *apophantic*, being-in-the-world, being-toward-death and *Ereignis*; she thinks the following definition adequate for audience-understanding: ‘*Gelassenheit* is the spirit of *disponibilité* before What-Is which permits us simply to let things be in whatever may be their uncertainty and their mystery’. She then uses the term *Gelassenheit* repeatedly, as though her single definition was sufficient for subsequent comprehension. I do not mean to demean Heidegger or Heidegger scholars by this not-so-imaginary example. I only mean to note that philosophers in general are not sufficiently versed in Heidegger terminology to grasp such papers. The author missed or misidentified her audience.

1 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-dont-moderate-muslims_b_8722518 (accessed 28 January 2024).

Consider another piece of philosophical writing:

Qian and *kun* are not the ideals, as there is imbalance and disharmony with the excess of yang and yin, respectively. Ideal states of affairs are found in hexagrams 11 and 63. In hexagram 11 (*Tai* [Peace]) the trigrams *qian* and *kun* are complementary coequals. In this ideal state the female is in ascendancy: *kun* is above, and *qian* is below. In this hexagram, heaven and earth embrace; heaven is on earth [...] *Tai* symbolizes springtime, a time of harmony when the forces of nature unite to bring forth abundance. Curiously, for a patriarchal society, when *qian*, the masculine, is above and *kun*, the feminine, is below as in hexagram 12 (*Pi* [Obstruction]), there is disorder and decline. Heaven has retreated from the earth, which is falling below. *Qian* and *kun* are disordered [...] and their improper relation produces stagnation and decay [...] The other most significant state of affairs is hexagram 63 (*Jiji* [Ferrying Complete]), with its alternating lines of yin and yang.²

How many of you have any idea what is being discussed here? What if I told you that it is from a paper on Chinese philosophy? Does that help? What if I told you that it is a discussion of the hexagrams in the *I Ching*, which were often used for fortune-telling? Still baffled? Confession: I wrote this in 2004, but not for you. I wrote it with a sinologist in a paper aimed at sinologists. As sinologists, the audience would already know the Chinese terms, the basic ideas of the *I Ching*, the historical situation of early Chinese texts and the roles of gender in early China. And you probably do not. But you were not my audience.

Many, most if I am honest, papers by Muslim scholars read to me like that paragraph on Chinese thought. I do not know Arabic (so citing long texts or even short phrases in Arabic is wasted on me), and I am not conversant in the basic ideas of the Mu'tazilīs or the Ḥanafīs; I am not aware of the socio-historical situations of the texts of al-Ghazālī or Ibn Sīnā, and I do not know the philosophical assumptions of this or that tradition. Finally, Islam is not my form of life (I am trying to understand it, but always as an outsider). Thus, if I read that al-Ghazālī is not a Mu'tazilī or that Ibn Sīnā affirms *al-fayḍ al-ilāhī*, I understand about as much as you understood of my Chinese paragraph.

If your audience consists of Muslim scholars who are educated in Islamic philosophy, then your modes of discourse are on target. But if your hoped-for-audience is contemporary secular scholars, then they are

2 Clark and Wang, 'A Confucian Defense of Gender Equity', p. 400.

woefully off target. This is not a Muslim-specific criticism: I often feel the same way when I read a paper by Aquinas scholars when it contains too much Aquinas-specific, medieval modes of discourse to be understood by contemporary philosophers (or at least by me).

Let me say this very clearly: I think some Muslim scholars should write papers at the highest levels of historical scholarship. Such papers will, of course, be accessible only to scholars who have attained to the highest levels of historical education. Most of that audience will likely be Muslims but there are some notable non-Muslims who will profit as well: Frank Griffel, for example, and Taneli Kukkonen. But the audience for such papers, like the audience for highly technical Aquinas papers, will be small. So be it. Some Muslims should advance Muslim historical scholarship at that level and for that audience.

But if you want to bring Islamic ideas into contemporary academic debates, learned modes of inquiry may require unlearning. For example, you will need to disassociate ideas from thinkers or traditions. Contemporary analytic epistemology is more interested in, say, justified true belief as a definition of knowledge than whether Plato or Russell first identified it (and what exactly they said about it). As you develop your thesis, ask yourself: Is there a concept or an argument or an insight in, say, al-Ghazālī that might contribute to debates in contemporary epistemology? If so, then use contemporary modes of epistemological inquiry – modal logic, Bayesianism, conceptual analysis, examples and counter-examples ('Chisholming', we used to affectionately say), and contemporary philosophical terms of art – to develop the argument. Do not use Aristotelian logic, Arabic, long textual quotations, outdated cultural examples, 'name-dropping' and medieval terms of art. I mention 'name-dropping' because names are often used as a shorthand for a philosophical idea, school of thought or critique; as such, when the name/concept pair does not resonate in the mind of the contemporary scholar, name-dropping creates an obstacle to understanding.

While you may think your insight so worthy of attention that contemporary scholars should work harder to get on board with traditional modes of Islamic scholarship, they will not. Although philosophers may espouse pluralism, most will not take the time and effort to decode a paper that seems as if it is in a foreign idiom. You need to do the translation work for them. Since it is the 'ideas' of al-Ghazālī, say, that may be of interest contemporary epistemologists, remove every obstacle that prevents their comprehension of what those ideas are.

I think there are interesting insights in early Chinese thought, but when communicating to contemporary philosophers, I try to motivate and inspire and inform using modes of discourse with which they are familiar. I try to remove all unnecessary obstacles to understanding.

Mutatis mutandis, I suggest the same translation process for Muslim epistemology. Consider now the following paragraph on the relevance of the philosophy of G. E. Moore to contemporary scepticism:

[I]n giving his proof, Moore knows full well that the sceptics will not be satisfied with it. Moore is not trying to give the sceptics something that they will be satisfied with. Moore's point, rather, is that we do not know that external things exist by proving this. On the contrary, we know that external things exist by perceiving them, and therefore sceptics are misguided in wanting a proof in the first place. When Moore gives his proof, therefore, his tongue is in his cheek [...]. It is not that Moore does not understand the sceptics' question, or that he does not understand what sceptics want when they request a proof that external things exist: he understands perfectly well what the sceptics are requesting, and he is challenging a variety of assumptions behind that request.³

This paragraph assumes little of its audience of contemporary epistemologists. It assumes that they know of Moore and his famous proof of an external world; and, if they have had a modicum of training in contemporary philosophy, they do (or should). It is void of technical terms of art and technical logical machinery. Of course, 'sceptics' and 'external things', as Moore uses the terms, are philosophical terms of art. But they are both well known to and well understood by philosophers. Thus, the reader should be able to easily grasp that Moore is not trying to refute the sceptic; rather, Moore is rejecting the sceptic's demand for a proof of the external world. This text, from John Greco, is, I think, a model of contemporary philosophical prose. Greco's writing invites the reader into important ideas, develops clear and concise arguments, and aims at definite and important conclusions. Write like that!

Finding models of excellent philosophical writing is key to learning how to write in your own clear and compelling voice. In addition to Greco, as well as the other authors that I have already mentioned, I commend Thomas Nagel, Jennifer Nagel, Simon Blackburn, Eleonore Stump, Colin McGinn, Susan Wolf and Peter van Inwagen. Not all of their writing is easy – like contemporary physics, contemporary philosophy is not easy – but their writing makes it as easy as it can be.

Not every piece by these philosophers is equally audience-sensitive. While I think Alvin Plantinga is a master of prose when his audience is contemporary philosophers, he has been considerably less successful at communicating to non-philosophers. His *The Nature of Necessity*, which

3 Greco, 'How to Reid Moore', p. 546.

was aimed at professional philosophers, advanced the discourse on modal semantics and then applied modal logic to both the problem of evil and the ontological argument. His free will defence is universally recognised as a decisive refutation of the logical problem of evil. Yet his *God, Freedom and Evil*, aimed at educated laypersons, was considerably less successful. Although Plantinga worked hard to accommodate his audience, his modes of discourse were simply too difficult and unfamiliar for his intended audience. Not to toot my own horn, but my *Return to Reason* proved better at communicating Plantingian epistemology to non-philosophers (hence, its affectionate nickname *Plantinga for Dummies*).

There are lots of audiences that Muslim scholars might wish to reach. I have mentioned four so far – the general public, educated laypersons, contemporary epistemologists and historical Islamicists. None of these audiences is better than any other. And they are all equally difficult to communicate to. It is easier to miss than to hit any of those targets. But if your intended audience is contemporary epistemologists, Muslim scholars need to become entirely conversant in the issues, scholars and modes of discourse of contemporary epistemology. Then they need to identify a clear and unambiguous thesis that should prove of interest to that audience. Finally, to hit their target, they need to write in the modes of discourse that are the *lingua franca* of that audience.

Why?

Why this paper, with this thesis, for this audience now? I want to reflect for a moment on why some Muslim scholars *de facto* engage in contemporary epistemology. I have noticed that some Muslims' attitudes towards epistemology are similar to those of some of my Christian brothers and sisters, attitudes that are reflected in their understanding of the nature of epistemology. Hence, I want to offer a critique of a conception of epistemology that is impaired, I think, by religious fervour. I will conclude with what I think the best understanding of epistemology is.

I find, and I am admittedly painting with a very wide brush here, that much epistemological reflection among contemporary Muslim philosophers involves a combination of Muslim apologetics and what I shall call 'Cartesianism'. While apologetics, the project of proving one's religious beliefs, is well-known, Cartesianism, as I am defining it, is less well known. Cartesianism, again as I am defining it, is the epistemological project of developing an algorithm for separating the known from the unknown (much like the hope that a Theory of Truth would provide an algorithm for separating the True from the False).

I recall giving a talk on belief in God as properly basic – that is, that a theist could be rational without the support of an argument – in a Muslim-majority

country. I used contemporary cognitive science of religion to show that we have a 'God-Faculty' – that is, something like what Alvin Plantinga calls the *sensus divinitatis* (an innate sense of the divine). I went on to argue, following Plantinga, Thomas Reid and G. E. Moore, that beliefs produced immediately (that is, without the support of an argument) by the God-Faculty are or could be rational. I also conceded that unbelief could be rational. My claim that atheism could be rational was a bridge too far. Members of the audience heatedly asked: 'What do you say to atheists? How can you be a theist and think atheists are rational? So what if belief in God is rational in your sense? What are we going to say to the atheists? Send us an evidentialist next time! We don't need an epistemology like yours'. It was clear that they wanted, and felt they needed, an epistemology that uniquely proved their religious beliefs and disproved all others. They wanted a Cartesian algorithm that separated the Known (their Muslim beliefs) from the Unknown (atheist's beliefs). And they were deeply disappointed that I had failed to deliver it.

I think, and again this is just my impression, that many Muslims seek an epistemology that offers an infallible guide to the foundational certitudes that ground all justified beliefs (usually their own). But, and this is why a new generation of Muslim scholars needs to wrestle with twentieth-century epistemology, there is good, unovercomable I think, reason to believe there is no such foundation. If there is such a foundation, it is sparse, and such a sparse foundation cannot support the rich panoply of what we know and believe. If there is no infallible epistemological foundation in general, then there is no infallible epistemological foundation for more substantive metaphysical or religious claims. Metaphysical arguments rely essentially on intuition, and studies have shown that humans have a remarkably diverse set of competing metaphysical intuitions; intuitions have come to seem like little more than cultured hunches.⁴ Moreover, metaphysical arguments are liable to *post hoc* rationalisations – reasons offered for what one already believes (prior to and independent of those reasons).⁵ Therefore, if your 'why' concerning epistemology is to prove Islam and refute atheism, then I think your 'why' is impossible.

Finally, I think the combination of Cartesianism and apologetics is conducive to unduly confident pronouncements about one's own beliefs, on the one hand, and unsympathetic and condescending rejections of the

4 See Cappelen, *Philosophy without Intuitions*. There is increasing empirical evidence that intuitions vary according to, for example, cultural background, socio-economic status and affective state. See Weinberg *et al.*, 'Normativity and Epistemic Intuitions', pp. 429–60; Weinberg *et al.*, 'Meta-Skepticism', pp. 224–46; Machery *et al.*, 'Semantics, Cross-Cultural Style'; Nichols and Knobe, 'Moral Responsibility and Determinism', pp. 663–85; Swain *et al.*, 'The Instability of Philosophical Intuitions', pp. 138–55.

5 See Kornblith, *On Reflection*.

rationality of others and their beliefs, on the other. A great deal of religious epistemology of the Cartesianism/apologetics variety is disguised intellectual arrogance, for example, arrogant rejections of atheism and arrogant defences of one's own belief tradition. Arguments, such as they are, are often 'clinched' with an arrogant and condescending horse laugh or snort (among one's believing friends) at the unbeliever's expense. Again, I find this practice as much among Christians as among Muslims.

I think pride, even in defence of religion, is a vice. Moreover, I think sincere epistemological reflection should lead to epistemic empathy and intellectual humility. I will reflect on the spiritual side of intellectual humility in the final section. I will here discuss briefly why epistemological reflection should engender humility.

First, there is the negative induction concerning substantive philosophical progress. That should give us pause. Some of the best thinkers in human history have thought long and hard about God, free will and immortality; yet, there is still widespread disagreement among the best contemporary thinkers about God, free will and immortality. There seems to be no philosophical method, no Cartesian algorithm, for settling philosophical disputes.

Second, the best explanation of widespread philosophical disagreement seems to be that our human cognitive equipment is not well-suited to settling philosophical truth. Our cognitive equipment seems better suited at making existential decisions in the here and now – 'will it rain tomorrow', 'is that an enemy or a friend', 'is that plant poisonous' – than thinking about abstract eternal verities.

Third, one way of telling that our cognitive equipment is not suited to grasping the world is that human intuitions differ (and there seems to be no non-question-begging epistemological method for adjudicating disagreement about intuitions). Insofar as philosophical arguments reduce to intuitions, then, philosophical agreement seems interminable. I think recent work in experimental philosophy and of Edouard Machery and Hilary Kornblith is especially poignant here.⁶

Since the best explanation of a historical lack of philosophical consensus is the limitations of our human cognitive equipment (demonstrated empirically by intractable disagreement about intuitions), epistemological reflection should lead to epistemic empathy and intellectual humility (not to intellectual arrogance and condescension).

If epistemology, then, cannot provide a Cartesian algorithm for separating the Known from the Unknown, of what use is it? I suggest that epistemology is the attempt to understand what we know and how we know (cognitive success and failure). As John Greco has argued, best practice

6 See Machery *et al.*, 'Semantics, Cross-Cultural Style', B1–B12.

in epistemology is explanation, not vindication.⁷ It explains how, when things go right, we know x and y and z (or instances of x and y and z). Thus, I suggest, following Chisholm's particularism, that we begin with paradigmatic cases of knowledge and then analyse how such knowledge might be possible.

What, then, are paradigmatic cases of knowledge? That is, what are the sorts of things humans know? Following, Reid, Moore and Greco, I think we know that there is a world independent of our minds, a world of material stuff with a distant past and an expected future; I am in this world along with other people, and we, throughout history, have jointly worked to refine our beliefs about the world, sometimes systematically in what we have come to call 'science'. Therefore, I think we know of the external world including (some of) its past and its future; I think I know that I am a minded, physical thing capable of knowing other minded, physical things; I think we remember some bits of our own past and have hopes for human futures; finally, I think we know, among other many other things, various items of contemporary science. How to explain such items of knowledge?

I think the two most spectacular failures of explaining these cases of human knowledge are classical foundationalism⁸ and coherentism.⁹ But I press on. I think the best explanations of how we know such things are found in the writings of Thomas Reid, Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff and John Greco, who hold that we come equipped with a set of cognitive dispositions or faculties which, typically, immediately (without inference) produce beliefs in the external world, the past, other persons, an enduring self with living memories and so on.¹⁰ I think very little of what we know is inferential (*contra* the assumption of classical foundationalism). Moreover, I think contemporary cognitive science provides empirical support for the Reid-Plantinga-Wolterstorff-Greco view.¹¹

Sometimes, at least some persons at least some of the time reason to various beliefs – some mathematicians, for example, reason to highly advance theorems, and some scientists reason to some natural laws (we should not exaggerate how often they reason to a theorem or a natural law, however, as most of what most mathematicians and scientists believe is through testimony, through teachers, textbooks and scholarly articles). Hence, we need a good explanation of how reasoning in advanced mathematics and the various sciences works. To that end, we are equipped with natural

7 Greco, 'Knowledge of God'.

8 See Kvanvig, 'What is Wrong with Minimal Foundationalism'.

9 See Van Cleve, 'Why Coherence is not Enough'; Harman, *Thought*.

10 See Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*; Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology*; Greco, *Achieving Knowledge*; Greco, 'Knowledge of God'.

11 Clark, *God and the Brain*.

dispositions to abstract (what-if) thinking, basic counting skills, the inductive principle, basic reasoning principles and so on. Suffice it to say, most of such knowledge is the province of professionals. Most of us, most of the time, and I include mathematicians and scientists here, learn advanced mathematics and theoretical physics, if at all, from teachers and textbooks. We simply accept what our teachers or books tell us. We seldom rely on our own experiments when we hold that $e = mc^2$ or Boyle's law (this is probably for the best because most of our experiments, most of the time, do not work). We rely extensively on the testimony of others, another non-inferential source of knowledge. And that means that knowledge is not an individualistic project, it is deeply social and communal.

What, then, are our cognitive dispositions? How do our dispositions to reason and think abstractly make high-level mathematical and theoretical physical knowledge possible? What are the 'when things go right' conditions of knowledge? How does testimony work (again, when things go right)? And how is knowledge social? These topics are under intense scrutiny and lively debate among contemporary epistemologists.

Finally, I think we know that there is a God who created the heavens and the earth and all that they contain (including me and you). How is knowledge of God possible? I think the greatest advances in religious epistemology of the past century occurred when philosophers began with the assumption that we know God and asked how such knowledge might be explained (such philosophers also rejected the defensive project of assuming God's non-existence until it is proven).

The next generation of well-trained Muslim epistemologists might need to develop new and independent modes of Islamic thought. As noted, many Muslim philosophers are attached to a tradition and a thinker. But it is possible that, like al-Ghazālī in his day, a contemporary Muslim thinker will need to find his or her own, new ways to think about issues in contemporary Islamic philosophy. Just as there is no reason to think, and every reason to reject, that Augustine or Aquinas (or Augustinianism or Thomism) got it all basically right, there is no reason to think, and every reason to reject, that any Muslim thinker or tradition got it all basically right. Islamic thought, then, may need to build a wider tent.

Epistemology of Creatures

I will now think, as a Christian alongside my Muslim brothers and sisters, about what it means, epistemologically, to be a creature. I will be brief.

The Cartesian mode arguably assumes that we are more epistemic gods than epistemic creatures. The Cartesian approach to epistemology assumes that humans have the ability to rise above their contingency and see the Truth clearly. That is, it assumes that humans have a god-like ability to

transcend their creatureliness. God, I take it, 'sees' all Truth directly, unencumbered by body or disturbing passions. But we are not gods – we are born at a particular time in a particular place with all that entails epistemologically. We start epistemic inquiry grounded in our own unique contingencies. There is simply no denying that, if I had been born in second-century-BC China, fifth-century-CE North Africa, or twenty-first-century Iran, I would have had a very different set of religious and philosophical beliefs that would have seemed just as obvious to me as mine do now. Assuming I had sufficient leisure time for reflection and I had been asked to defend my Chinese, North African or Iranian beliefs, I would have invoked intuitions particular to those times and places. We are creatures in this epistemic sense: we are contingent, created by God at a particular time and place, given without our consent a host of beliefs and assumptions and intuitions about the nature of Ultimate Reality. We must accept, I think, our contingency as a gift.

In addition to contingency, we must accept our creaturely finitude. Again, unlike the Infinite who 'sees' the Truth directly unencumbered by body or disturbing passions, our cognitive equipment is mediated by body (brain) and passion. As epistemic creatures, we must rely on our finite, creaturely modes of inquiry and discovery. As finite creatures, we have limited abilities to access the truth about Ultimate Reality. We have cognitive equipment that works quite well in grasping what is necessary to survive and occasionally flourish in the here and now – we can see, hear, touch, taste and smell; we can learn from our family and community what they have learned from theirs about what to embrace and what to avoid (for example, bananas, on the one hand, and certain mushrooms, on the other); we have an increasingly better but far from infallible sense of what is right and wrong (it took hundreds of thousands of years before humans rejected slavery and endorsed the equal rights of women); and we can project into the future in various ways (to plan our crops, say, and develop some sort of science). But we are epistemically limited: hardly anyone can really grasp $e = mc^2$; no one, I believe, can grasp the extent and depth of the divine nature.

Moreover, and cognitive science seems to support this, God has given us cognitive equipment that is adequate to leading a good life, which includes knowing and relating to God and to God's other creatures.¹² We cannot know God's essence, but we can know enough of God to live a good life. Again, for that, we should be grateful. Unlike God, we cannot know everything. As creatures, we should be epistemically humble, gracious and even generous.

12 Clark, *God and the Brain*.

We are epistemically contingent and epistemically finite, thank God. We may want to be epistemic gods, but we cannot. Again, thank God. We should be grateful for how, when and why God created us.

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CHAPTER 14

Epistemological Foundations of Qur'anic Ethics: Understanding, Wisdom and Righteousness

M. Ashraf Adeel

Introduction

Within Qur'anic epistemology, the epistemic states of understanding and wisdom are closely connected. Understanding presupposes knowledge,¹ or at least generally true beliefs, while wisdom is a kind of reflective understanding or meta-understanding aiming at producing the best action in a given situation on the basis of what is understood. In this chapter, I will briefly elaborate on this thought before connecting understanding and wisdom with the central ethical concept of the Qur'an – that is, *taqwā* or intellectual and moral conscientiousness. The central concern is to make explicit the epistemic underpinnings of the ethics of the Qur'an, by showing that it envisages *taqwā* or conscience to be sustained by reflective understanding.

Understanding and Wisdom in the Qur'an

Contemporary epistemologists have identified different forms of understanding.² I will focus on the form called objectual or holistic understanding,

- 1 Epistemologists distinguish understanding from knowledge. Knowledge is generally considered to be that of a proposition while understanding has different forms as noted in note 2. Philosophical views of knowledge and understanding are multiple and the debate over them is a permanent feature of all periods in the history of philosophy. For a long time, knowledge was defined as justified true belief (JTB). However, this view was challenged by Edmund Gettier in 1963 by arguments showing that JTB could be produced by lucky accident. Ever since, there have been many different efforts either to repair the JTB definition by strengthening it with a fourth condition or to replace it by the view in virtue epistemology that knowledge is virtuously produced true belief. Various theories about understanding that have been proposed in contemporary epistemology are listed in note 13.
- 2 For example, epistemologists talk about 'understanding-what', 'understanding-why' and 'objectual or holistic understanding'. See, for example, Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and Pursuit of Understanding*, p. 189.

which has an object as its target (see below), because this is the kind of state which the relevant Qur'anic verses seem to presuppose or imply.³ Before discussing this form of understanding further, let us first look at verses of the Qur'an that involve a reference to understanding to get an idea of how the Qur'an employs this concept.

The Arabic term *dhū lubb* (pl. *ulū al-albāb*) means 'possessing understanding' or 'being a person of understanding'.⁴ Another expression that can mean 'understanding' is *fiqh*, which can also mean 'knowledge'.⁵ Here our focus is the term *ulū l-albāb* or 'persons of understanding'. We shall also look at *fiqh* to see where it is used to mean 'understanding'.

The following verses of the Qur'an presuppose or imply some characteristic of 'persons of understanding': grasping far-reaching implications of a principle (Q. 2:179); referring to having *taqwā* or religio-moral sense (Q. 2:197, 5:100, 65:10); grasping the significance of wisdom (Q. 2:269); correctly grasping the message of fundamental and allegorical verses of the Qur'an (Q. 3:7); grasping the meaning of signs in creation (Q. 3:190); grasping the lesson of a story (Q. 12:111); taking heed from revelation (Q. 13:19, 14:52, 38:29, 40:54); taking God's blessings as a reminder (Q. 38:43); paying heed to the difference between devout and un-devout, knowledgeable and ignorant (Q. 39:9); listening to speech and following its best meaning (Q. 39:18); and taking rain and the lifecycle of crops as a reminder (Q. 39:21).

In Q. 2:179, the Qur'an speaks about the legal principle of equal retribution and says that there is life for humans in this principle, presumably at both a personal and social level. This principle can help 'people of understanding' attain righteousness, for without such retribution there would be chaos in our personal and collective lives.⁶ Hence, the Qur'an seems to link

3 It seems worth bearing in mind that classical and modern commentaries on the Qur'an do not focus on the epistemic concepts employed in the verses of the Qur'an. Their focus is instead on the overall meanings of the verses. Our concern here is with the nature of epistemic states that seem to be involved in the Qur'anic usage of epistemic terms. Hence, this chapter should not be read as a commentary on the verses referred to here. It should be looked at as an effort to derive epistemic concepts from the Qur'an.

4 Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, p. 2443.

5 Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, p. 2429.

6 The same point is underscored in *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*: "These are succinct and eloquent words which mean: "You should not kill one another". Sufyān related that from as-Suddī from Abū Mālik. It means that when retaliation is established and achieved, it will deter the one who wants to kill someone else out of the fear that retaliation will be taken from him, and so both remain alive. It had previously been the case that, when one man killed another, their two tribes would fight and that would lead to many deaths. When Allah prescribed retaliation, it was a deterrent and they stopped fighting. Therefore, they had life through that'. Bewley (trans.), *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, vol. 2, p. 114.

appreciation of the deeper implications of a principle with the epistemic state of understanding in this verse.⁷

In verses Q. 2:197, 5:100 and 65:10 the Qur'an connects understanding with having *taqwā* or religio-moral sense. As elaborated below, *taqwā* is one of the most comprehensive religio-moral and epistemic terms in the Qur'an.⁸ Basically, it refers to a comprehensive conscience – that is, the ability of a human being to distinguish between right and wrong in all matters in order to do what is right and his or her realisation that the ultimate criterion of judgement on human actions is with God, not human beings. In Q. 2:197, God says that 'the best provision is *taqwā*' and asks people of understanding to 'fear Me' (*wa-ittaqūnī*). In Q. 5:100, people of understanding are exhorted to have *taqwā* by pointing out that evil and good are not equal, and that success is linked with good. What seems to be implied is that understanding helps achieve *taqwā* insofar as *taqwā* is an ability to distinguish good from evil.⁹ Similarly, Q. 65:10 asks people of understanding to have *taqwā* or distinguish right from wrong. Hence, having *taqwā* appears to be a characteristic of the people of understanding. The verses seem to be saying that since good and evil are not equivalent, persons of understanding use their understanding to grasp this distinction. In other words, understanding facilitates moral conscientiousness.

Q. 2:269 highlights wisdom as an 'abundant good' and points out that only people of understanding appreciate this significance of wisdom

7 *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* and *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* give a similar interpretation, although their focus is not on the epistemic state of understanding. *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* comments: "O men of understanding, that you may acquire *Taqwā*". means, "O you who have sound minds, comprehension and understanding! Perhaps by this you will be compelled to refrain from transgressing the prohibitions of Allah and what He considers sinful". Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, vol. 1, p. 489. *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* says: 'In retaliation there is life for you, that is great longevity, O people of pith, possessors of intellect, because if the would-be killer knew that he would be killed [in retaliation], he would refrain [from such action] and would have thereby given life to himself and to the one whom he had intended to kill; and so it [retaliation] was stipulated by the Law, so that you might fear killing, fearing retaliation'. Al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, pp. 26–27.

8 Fazlur Rahman has also noted that *taqwā*, *īmān* and *islām* are the three foundational concepts of Islamic ethics and that all three have similar meanings: 'We have already seen that the roots of both *īmān* and *islām* have in common the basic constituents of safety, peace, and integrity (as opposed to danger, fragmentation, and disintegration). Interestingly and importantly, when we inquire into the root meaning of *taqwā*, we get the same answer. The root-letters *w-q-y* in Arabic mean "to protect", "to save from destruction". Rahman, 'Some Key Ethical Concepts of the Qur'an', p. 176.

9 Ibn Kathīr comments: '[Those] who have sound minds, avoid and abandon the impermissible, and let the permissible be sufficient for you . . .' Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, vol. 3, p. 278.

through remembrance.¹⁰ Similarly, Q. 3:7 underscores that people of understanding grasp the whole message of the Qur'an, allegorical as well as fundamental, from God. Their approach is holistic. Q. 3:190 and 39:21 refer to the grasping, by the people of understanding, of the meaning of the signs in creation, whereas Q. 12:111 points out that grasping the lesson of a story is also a matter of understanding. In verses Q. 13:19, 14:52 and 40:54, the Qur'an relates understanding with the idea of taking heed from revelation. Q. 38:40 takes understanding as an ability to see worldly blessings as reminders of God. Verse Q. 39:9 points out that people of understanding see the difference between the devout and undevout, as well as the knowledgeable and ignorant. In Q. 39:18 people of understanding are marked as those who listen (carefully) to speech and follow its best meaning.

As noted earlier, *fiqh* is another term that can mean 'understanding' in certain contexts. Some of the more relevant contexts of the use of its variants for discussion here are as follows: understanding a statement (Q. 4:78); diversification of signs to make people understand (Q. 6:65); detailing signs for people who understand (Q. 6:98); having hearts with which people do not understand (Q. 7:179); steadfastness related to understanding (Q. 8:65); failure to accept revelation shows a lack of understanding (Q. 9:127); understanding is involved in comprehension of others' speech (Q. 18:93, 20:28); fearing humans more than God shows a lack of understanding (Q. 59:13); hypocrisy involves a lack of understanding (Q. 63:7); and mastering the concepts of religion is a matter of understanding (Q. 9:122). However, these contexts do not seem to add anything new to the functions of understanding that emerge from an analysis of all the Qur'anic contexts involving the term *ulū al-albāb*. They only reinforce what is already presupposed or implied.

This analysis of all the relevant verses brings us to a rather composite Qur'anic concept of understanding. Understanding seems to function in the following ways at least: insight into deeper aspects of a principle; a kind of a cognitive state that contributes to or facilitates our special ability or disposition to distinguish right from wrong in all situations; a cognitive state or ability to grasp the significance of wisdom for human life; a special aptitude or disposition to seeing natural phenomena as pointing toward God or deeper meaning; the ability to see a story as a connected whole and to draw a moral or lesson from it; comprehending an entire system of ideas and values and grasping their interrelations; seeing a higher dimension to worldly blessings or trials; comprehensively grasping the difference

10 Ibn Kathīr says: 'Those who will benefit from the advice are those who have sound minds and good comprehension with which they understand the words (of advice and reminder) and their implications'. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, vol. 2, p. 60.

between two different ways of life; and mastery of a language and following the best of its meanings in different situations.¹¹

From this summary of the functions of understanding, three key ideas emerge: understanding is acquired by grasping the deeper logical or interpretive implications of principles and phenomena as well as stories and so on; understanding is involved in grasping the ethical and the wiser course of action; and understanding is involved in the mastery of a language. These texts also show that the Qur'an takes understanding to be a cognitive state at some times and a disposition or ability at others.

Given these key ideas about understanding, it can be argued that the relevant Qur'anic contexts are primarily about what has been called objectual or holistic understanding by contemporary epistemologists. Such understanding has an object as its target. The object could be a language, an art, a discipline, or sub-discipline like physics or quantum mechanics, or even a practice such as mastery of a language. It could also be an organisation, a car, or a house. Objectual or holistic understanding involves grasping of dependence relations between different parts, along with understanding the parts. Such dependence relations could be logical/inferential or causal.¹² As I look at it, understanding of the parts consists of having understanding-what about them. Understanding-what is the same thing as having propositional knowledge. We may not have knowledge of some propositions about a part, and we may have only true, or even some false, beliefs about them. But this latter type of understanding is not normally distinguished from propositional knowledge. The important thing for having objectual understanding of an object is to grasp the relations between its various parts and achieve a holistic sense of the nature of the object through such a grasp. In this process, most of our beliefs about the parts need to be true. They need not necessarily to be at the level of knowledge – that is, not only true but justified – although that helps. Understanding of an object or a discipline or a language can be attained by having knowledge or, at least, mostly true beliefs about its parts and by grasping the interrelations between the parts to get an overall sense of its nature.

Such a view of objectual or holistic understanding makes it parasitic on knowledge or at least true belief and, hence, is primarily intellectualist.¹³ That, I think, is the correct view of objectual understanding, for a variety

11 Cf. Adeel, *Epistemology of the Quran*, p. 63.

12 For a discussion of dependence relations in this regard, see Grimm, 'The Goal of Explanation', and Grimm, 'Understanding as Knowledge of Causes'.

13 Roughly speaking, there are four major views of understanding in contemporary analytic epistemology: Intellectualism, Anti-intellectualism, Inferentialism and Explanatory Coherentism. Intellectualism, a view advocated by Linda Zagzebski, Jonathan Kvanvig, Catherine Elgin and Stephan Grimm, among others, takes understanding to be a higher form of knowledge where the epistemic agent has an insight into or grasp

of reasons. The most important is the fact of the unity of mind and its faculties. The senses and reason function in unison with understanding as well as intuition. The beliefs furnished to us by senses and reason, or intellect, are simultaneously connected by understanding and reason with each other and sorted into groups and categories. In the process, understanding of a whole subject-matter might emerge from the grasp of connections between individual beliefs. Another reason to favour this interpretation is that, once we understand a subject-matter, we can do things with parts of it in an effective and better (or even correct) way. This ability of our understanding to help us do things through our individual beliefs with parts of the whole (that we understand) is evidence for the connection between individual beliefs and understanding. Such a connection cannot be one-sided. If holistic understanding can function through individual beliefs, then individual beliefs must also be contributory to holistic understanding. If grasping the interrelations between individual beliefs is part of the process of generating understanding of the overall subject, then the content of the individual beliefs must inform the understanding as well. Otherwise, the understanding will be blind regarding the individual beliefs and will not be able to make use of them after its emergence.

Understanding in the Qur'an, as noted above, is involved in grasping the ethical and wiser course of action in a given situation. It is also involved with listening to language and following its best meaning. That, too, is a

of the reasons that make a belief or a group thereof true. It involves a grasp of explanatory connections between pieces of information and insight into the way in which information is organised into a whole. This view is normally contrasted with Anti-intellectualism, an approach that takes understanding to be a form of practical knowledge not reducible to propositional knowledge. It is more a matter of cognitive abilities and skills, knowledge-how rather than knowledge-that. It is an ability to explain and to apply knowledge in context. This view is found, with emphasis on varying aspects, in the writings of Jason Stanley, Timothy Williamson, Duncan Pritchard and Ellen Fridland. Inferentialism emphasises the role of inferential relations in the attainment of understanding. These relations help an epistemic agent understand a subject-matter by seeing the logical and conceptual connections between different items of knowledge about it. Robert Brandom, Wilfrid Sellars, John McDowell and, before them, Wittgenstein seemed to hold such a view. Explanatory Coherentism emphasises that understanding involves possession of a coherent and unified set of explanations of a phenomenon or subject-matter. Writers such as Phillip Kitcher, Catherine Elgin, Carl Hempel, Bas van Fraassen and Phillip Pettit have taken this position. These four views are not always mutually exclusive and the discussion about them is more a matter of shifts in emphases than logical exclusion. For some relevant works, see Zagzebski, *Virutes of the Mind*; Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and Pursuit of Understanding*; Grimm, 'Is Understanding a Species of Knowledge?'; Elgin, *True Enough*; Stanley and Williamson, 'Knowing How'; Fridland, 'They've Lost Control'; Pritchard, *Epistemology*; van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image*; Kitcher, *Science, Truth and Democracy*; and Hempel, *Aspects of Scientific Explanation*.

practical ability. Hence, the Qur'anic view of understanding, although primarily intellectualist, is also mindful of the link between understanding and knowledge-how. It is not a purely intellectualist view, if we insist on a distinction between knowledge-that and knowledge-how.¹⁴ In this respect, understanding seems connected to what Kant has called practical reason. Our holistic understanding of a situation contributes toward our choosing correctly in that situation. It is a facilitator of practical reason, or the ability to choose the right action in a given situation. This point will come out more clearly below as we consider the Qur'anic concept of wisdom and its connection with understanding.

Let us turn now to the concept of wisdom in the Qur'an, which is a kind of reflective understanding, or what might be called meta-understanding. Elements of this concept can be found in such verses as Q. 2:129, 2:151, 2:269, 3:48, 3:164, 5:110, 38:20, 43:63 and 62:2. Verse Q. 31:12 also connects wisdom with the virtue of gratitude through the story of the proverbial wise man, Luqman. These verses point to the following elements of wisdom: wisdom is abundant moral and intellectual good; it is a knowledge that can be taught and learned; it is involved with making the best argument on a subject; it involves understanding, discernment of speech and the ability to clarify contentious issues; and it leads to moral and spiritual rectitude or overall righteousness.¹⁵

Thus, *ḥikma* (wisdom), this abundant moral and intellectual good consists of knowledge, understanding and the best possible arguments that should jointly lead to overall *taqwā* or righteousness. Hence, in the Qur'an, wisdom is a form of knowledge as well as understanding that produces comprehensive righteousness in one's life. It is a virtue that the Qur'an seems to take to be a product of knowledge and understanding involving the best arguments or reasoning. Hence wisdom, being a virtue, does appear to be an ability to act righteously. Although it is an epistemic or cognitive state, it is a state that produces overall righteousness or virtue.¹⁶

This concept of wisdom is a form of reflective understanding or meta-understanding that harnesses our knowledge and holistic understanding of a situation or area of life for the purposes of finding and choosing the righteous course to act upon. In the Qur'an, we do not find something like

14 This distinction between knowledge-that (the relation between a thinker and a true proposition) and knowledge-how (the ability to do something) was initially drawn by Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*. It has been recently questioned by Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson as untenable. See Stanley and Williamson, 'Knowing How'. The debate is ongoing, and Huiming Ren has defended the distinction in his 'The Distinction between Knowledge-That and Knowledge-How'.

15 For a more elaborate discussion of these verses, see Adeel, *Epistemology of the Quran*, pp. 100–1.

16 Adeel, *Epistemology of the Quran*, p. 101.

the Aristotelian distinction between *sophia* (theoretical wisdom) and *phronesis* (practical wisdom). The Qur'an explicitly connects understanding with our choice of the ethical and the wiser course of action. This happens when we reflect on our holistic understanding of a situation or area of life to determine how best to use this understanding for achieving comprehensive success or virtue. When we engage in such reflection, we connect understanding with the best choice and action. In other words, we sharpen our *taqwā* or reflective conscience.¹⁷ Wisdom in the Qur'an seems to be this sharpening of conscience that is a form of meta-understanding.

If wisdom presupposes understanding and understanding presupposes knowledge, or at least true belief, then there seems to be a sequential relationship between these three states. This simply means that the higher states are built on the lower ones. Propositional knowledge and true belief go into making understanding possible, and then understanding can turn upon itself reflectively to make wisdom possible. Wisdom, therefore, involves both knowledge and understanding plus human conscience. Such wisdom helps us live a wholesome life, a life of comprehensive flourishing. This view of understanding is obviously not the only view, but this is not the place to adjudicate in that debate.¹⁸ Below I connect this view of meta-understanding or wisdom with conscience and *taqwā*.

Understanding and Wisdom as Foundations of *Taqwā* or Righteousness

The purpose of this section is to examine three important Qur'anic concepts of the human soul and their connections with *taqwā*, as well as wisdom or meta-understanding. The target is to determine the role that *taqwā* and wisdom play in shaping human character. Three aspects of the soul mentioned in the Qur'an are *al-naḥs al-ammāra bi-l-sū'* (the soul that persistently enjoins evil), *al-naḥs al-lawwāma* (the reproaching soul) and *al-naḥs al-muṭma'inna* (the satisfied soul). *Nafs* is normally translated as 'self' or 'soul', but here it obviously means three dimensions or tendencies of the human psyche or soul.¹⁹

Regarding *al-naḥs al-ammāra bi-l-sū'*, equated by Muslim scholars with the sensuous aspect of the human soul, the Qur'an says that this lower element of the human being persistently tends toward evil: 'And I do not acquit myself. Indeed, the soul is a persistent enjoiner of evil, except those

17 For a discussion on the Qur'anic equation between *taqwā* and reflective conscience, see Adeel, *Epistemology of the Quran*, Chapter 4, and below.

18 For an overview of different views of understanding, see Gordon, 'Understanding in Epistemology'.

19 Cf. Rahman, *The Major Themes of the Qur'an*, p. 12.

upon which my Lord has mercy. Indeed, my Lord is Forgiving and Merciful' (Q. 12:53). *Nafs al-lawwāma* is described as a dimension of the soul that reproaches a person for his tendencies toward evil: 'And I swear by the reproaching soul [to the certainty of resurrection]' (Q. 75:2). Finally, *al-nafs al-muṭma'inna* is described as satisfied and well pleased: 'O soul who is satisfied! Return to your Lord, well pleased and pleasing' (Q. 89:27–28).

From these descriptions, it appears that the human soul has a reflective conscience (*al-nafs al-lawwāma*) that continuously supervises its negative, evil or irrational sensuous tendencies (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi-l-sū'*).²⁰ If *al-nafs al-lawwāma* succeeds in its efforts to bring all inclinations and desires under control and pursue only the right ones, over time the human soul turns into *al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*. As we will discuss below, the foundation for *nafs al-lawwāma* is given to the human soul (see Q. 91:7–8). This foundation is a natural ability to distinguish between right and wrong and constitutes the initial form of *taqwā*. We then build upon this ability and through persisting on the right course in life, turn it into a full blown *taqwā* – that is, comprehensive moral and intellectual conscientiousness. Once we are fully settled in *taqwā*, it is possible for the soul to become satisfied. *Taqwā* keeps *al-nafs al-ammāra bi-l-sū'* in check and decides the right and wrong of an inclination and ensures, with the help of wisdom or meta-understanding, that only the right choice is acted upon. In a person with settled *taqwā* and wisdom, this is normally the case.

Nafs al-lawwāma is equated by some modern commentators of the Qur'an with conscience. Amin Ahsan Islahi, for example, has equated it with conscience in his *Tadabbur-i-Quran*.²¹ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, while commenting on Q. 75:2, has taken the three types of *nafs* mentioned in the Qur'an as 'stages of the development of the human soul' as *per* the doctors (presumably Sufis) of Islam. He has stated that the 'second stage may be compared to Conscience'.²² (Whether these types of *nafs* should be understood as stages of development is something we shall explore in a moment.) Similarly, Abū al-A'lā Mawdūdī has commented on the same verse and said that *nafs al-lawwāma* is 'conscience that blames humans for doing evil and is a testimony to man's accountability for his actions'.²³

Among the classical commentaries, Ibn Kathir clearly equates *al-nafs al-lawwāma* with the conscience. He says the following:

In reference to *Al-nafs il-lawwāma*, Qurrah bin Khalid reported from Al-Hasan Al-Basri that he said about this Ayah, 'Verily, by Allah, we

20 See Islahi, *Tadabbur-i-Quran*, pp. 79 and 225, for this evil tendency in the human soul.

21 Islahi, *Tadabbur-i-Quran*, pp. 78–79.

22 Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, p. 1565, n. 5810.

23 Mawdūdī, *Tarjama-ul-Quran*, pp. 1499–500.

think that every believer blames himself. He says (questioning himself), "What did I intend by my statement? What did I intend by my eating? What did I intend in what I said to myself?" However, the sinner proceeds ahead, and he does not blame himself. Ibn Jarir recorded from Sa'id bin Jubayr that he said concerning Allah's statement, (And nay! I swear by *Al-nafs il-lawwāma*), 'He criticizes himself in good and bad'. Similar has been reported from 'Ikrimah. Ibn Abi Najih reported from Mujahid: 'He is sorry for what he missed (of good deeds) and he blames himself for it'.²⁴

It seems obvious that this *nafs* is performing the task of evaluating human behaviour, and that is the role of conscience.

Comments with similar import can be found in other classical commentaries. They simply call *al-nafs al-lawwāma* the reproaching or self-accusing self. *Tafsīr Ibn 'Abbās* says: 'It is also said that the accusing soul in question is the soul that reproaches itself; and it is also said: it is the soul that repents of its sins and reproaches itself for what it had committed . . .'²⁵ In a similar vein, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* calls *al-nafs al-lawwāma* 'the one that reproaches itself even if it should expend great effort in being virtuous . . .'²⁶ The key idea of a reproaching or self-accusing self seems functionally to be the same as that of a conscience. Therefore, I tend to agree with the modern commentators in equating *al-nafs al-lawwāma* with conscience in its original natural form. It should be noted, however, that the original ability to distinguish right from wrong need not be equated with a fully developed conscience that emerges in humans over time.

Let us turn to the question of stages in the development of the soul. Those who take the three types of *nafs* as stages of development of the soul consider the sensuous soul or *al-nafs al-ammāra bi-l-sū'* to be the first stage, followed by the reproaching soul or *al-nafs al-lawwāma* and culminating in the satisfied soul or *al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*. But that view clashes with verses Q. 91:7–8, which underscore the ability to distinguish right from wrong as a natural or original part of the human self: 'And [by] the soul and He who proportioned it. And inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness'.

Thus, it appears odd to assume that the soul moves from the sensuous to the reproaching when the reproaching soul is already present in it originally. I think it might be best to assume that, while the reproaching soul in its initial form is present in all humans, as *per* the Qur'an, it develops into a full-blown conscience through inculcation of *taqwā* –

24 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, vol. 10, p. 262.

25 Ibn 'Abbās, *Tafsīr Ibn 'Abbās*, p. 819.

26 Al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, p. 581.

that is, righteousness or virtue. This happens when the reproaching soul (conscience in its initial form) critically evaluates the evil tendencies of *al-nafs al-ammāra bi-l-sū*, subjecting them to rational adjudication. As the sensuous tendencies are brought under rationality (through meta-understanding, as I will argue) and acted upon in the right way repeatedly, we end up inculcating greater *taqwā* in our soul. Every step of the way, the reproaching soul plays the role of helping us evaluate what we are doing. Its role is thus transformative in relation to *al-nafs al-ammāra bi-l-sū*. It is strengthened itself as well in the process of bringing our sensuous tendencies under the rationality of *taqwā*. In that sense, we can say that a strengthened or developed reproaching soul or conscience is a form of *taqwā*²⁷ and presents a stage in the development of the human soul from the sensuous over the conscientious to the satisfied self. I will return to the nature and role of *taqwā* below.

This process of bringing the sensuous self under the sovereignty of conscience seems comparable to what has been called *tazkiyat al-nafs* or purification/cleansing of the soul, which has been developed by the Sufi masters (mystics of Islam) in detail.²⁸ We are concerned here with the ethical nature of such a process only. Our issue is to understand the process from a rational point of view. So far, we have seen that *al-nafs al-lawwāma* functions as conscience. We have hinted that it regulates or cleanses our sensuous side or *al-nafs al-ammāra bi-l-sū*. This term literally means 'a persistent enjoiner of evil' (12:53). *Al-nafs al-ammāra bi-l-sū* can also be translated as 'the soul commanding to evil'. The implication is that this aspect of the human soul tends to command our lives. In other words, there is a tendency for our sensuous desires and inclinations to overtake our lives completely. These desires and inclinations are not inherently geared toward moderation and balance. They tend to and can succeed in overtaking us as human beings, disrupting the balance of our life. It is in this sense, probably, that the Qur'an characterises this *nafs* as 'a persistent enjoiner of evil'. Our sensuality can persist in trying to disrupt the balance in our lives.

27 Fazlur Rahman has said the following in this regard: 'Considering all the verses in the Qur'an related to this concept, perhaps the best way to define *taqwā* is to say that, whereas action belongs to man, real and effective judgement upon that action, as well as the standard whereby that action is to be judged, lie outside of him. Similarly, in the case of the collective performance of a society, both the final criterion of judgment upon it and the judgment itself transcend that society. When a man or a society is fully conscious of this while conducting himself or itself, he or it has true *taqwā*. This idea can be effectively conveyed by the term "conscience", if the object of conscience transcends it'. Fazlur Rahman seems to sum up his view by calling *taqwā* 'solidarity of character'. Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 20.

28 For a recent non-mystical analysis of the process, see Picken, 'Tazkiyat al-nafs'.

As al-Ghazālī puts it: 'If [the] soul gives up protests and surrenders itself to the devil, it is called Nafs Ammarah or passion addicted to evils'.²⁹ The disruptive role of sensuality in our lives is equated with evil by the Qur'an. The point is made with telling clarity:

But if they do not respond to you – then know that they only follow their [own] desires. And who is more astray than one who follows his desire without guidance from God? Indeed, God does not guide the wrongdoing people (Q. 28:50).

The moral and spiritual challenge, therefore, is to control this tendency toward evil and regulate sensuous desires and inclinations to keep them within the bounds of moderation as enjoined by the moral law (Q. 2:143, 5:66, 25:67, 54:49). That is why the Qur'an explicitly connects *falāḥ* (comprehensive success) with saving one's soul from its covetousness or avarice:

So, fear [God] as much as ye can; listen and obey and spend in charity for the benefit of your own soul and those saved from the covetousness of their own souls, – they are the ones that achieve prosperity (*falāḥ*) (Q. 64:16).³⁰

The role of the initial form of conscience or *al-naḥs al-lawwāma* is to reproach the soul for this persistent tendency toward evil or, in case one gives in to it, any acts based on such a tendency. Such self-evaluation provides the initial basis for controlling and regulating the passions and desires. At this juncture, our sense of righteousness, *taqwā*, can come into play and check our passions and desires from disrupting the balance in our life. If our *taqwā* succeeds in this effort in a given situation, a foundation is laid in us for acting righteously and keeping the relevant passion or desire within the framework of correct balance as *per* our best rational understanding of that situation. If this happens repeatedly, our *taqwā* increases. As a result, our conscience is strengthened. Our sense of righteousness and our rational understanding of a given situation come together to choose the right way of pursuing a desire or an end. Rational understanding of the situation helps us decide how it (understanding) can

29 Fazl-ul-Karim (trans.), *Revival of Religious Learnings*, vol. 3, p. 9.

30 This follows the translation of Yusuf Ali. Additionally, al-Suyūṭī agrees with scholars who say that this verse abrogates verse Q. 3:102, which calls on believers to fear God as He should be feared, because having *taqwā* as much as is God's right is impossible. This verse instead asks us to have *taqwā* as *per* our capacity. See al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-qur'ān*, vol. 1, p. 60.

best be used to act righteously. That is how it turns into wisdom or meta-understanding.

This process can be better understood by elaborating on the Qur'anic concept of *taqwā* and linking it with wisdom or meta-understanding. A careful and thorough analysis of the Qur'anic concept of *taqwā* shows it to have the following elements:

1. *Taqwā* has its basis in a natural human ability to distinguish right from wrong.
2. This natural basis is built upon to acquire a stable orientation or disposition of character for doing the right thing by making an effort to stay on the right (guided) course. Hence, *taqwā* is an acquired stable disposition or orientation of character built upon a naturally given basis.
3. *Taqwā* is foundational and general in nature, and all specific virtues stem from it. It is the root of virtues, so to speak.
4. *Taqwā* produces the best outcome for the agent through performance of actions rooted in it. In other words, *taqwā* is linked with success.
5. *Taqwā* protects humans from evil impulses and, thereby, makes them act from right motivation.³¹

We have already noted above that verse Q. 91:8 points to the original or natural ability of the human soul to distinguish between righteousness (*taqwā*) and wickedness (*fujūr*), and that this ability is the same as *al-naḥs al-lawwāma*. That *taqwā* is an acquired stable disposition comes out in Q. 47:17 and 49:3. The first verse says that God 'increases' the righteousness of those who do the right thing. That means that repeated right action increases or strengthens our *taqwā*. Hence, on the basis of the initial sense of right and wrong and acting rightly repeatedly in life, we can end up with a stable or strengthened acquired *taqwā*. It becomes a stable disposition with us, particularly after our hearts have been 'tested' by God, as *per* Q. 49:3. The verse implies that, in every choice, the disposition of our hearts gets tested. Those who make the right choices find their disposition strengthened.

That *taqwā* is foundational to all specific virtues can be seen from verses Q. 2:177 and 9:109. The first verse places several specific virtues – such as faith, charity and the freeing of slaves – under the general umbrella of *taqwā*, and the second one declares it to be the better foundation for a building. But given the moral connotations of the term, it can be deduced that *taqwā* would be a better foundation, not only for a building but also

31 This summary is taken from Adeel, *Epistemology of the Quran*, p. 47.

for human character.³² This simply means that *taqwā* is our general sense of righteousness and underpins all specific virtues for the Qur'an, as explicitly underscored in Q. 2:177.

Taqwā is also linked by the Qur'an with 'the best outcome' or success in Q. 20:132. This best outcome of *taqwā* or virtue is *falāḥ*, or comprehensive success both in this world and in the hereafter. For instance: 'That is Paradise, which We give as inheritance to those of Our servants who were fearing of God (*man kāna taqīyya*)' (19:63).³³

One of the key characteristics of *taqwā*, or virtue, noted by the Qur'an is that it protects humans from evil impulses: 'Indeed, those who fear God (have *taqwā*) – when an impulse touches them from Satan, they remember [Him] and at once they have insight' (7:201). The point of having 'insight' seems to be that people with *taqwā* immediately see the evil character of such an impulse. This means that they do not give in to an evil motivation or impulse while performing actions. They see it for what it is and, hence, do not act upon it. In other words, they act only on the basis of a right impulse or motivation. This is particularly so when *taqwā* has been habituated in them as a firm disposition through repeatedly acting from righteous motivations.

Given this overall concept of *taqwā*, one can see that it is a component of the initial form of conscience or *al-nafs al-lawwāma*. This *nafs* evaluates the righteousness and wickedness of our motivations and actions and, hence, works with a sense of 'righteousness' as well as 'wickedness'. This initial sense of righteousness is then slowly strengthened into a firm acquired disposition to act righteously because of repeatedly acting out of righteous motivation or *taqwā*. Here, *taqwā* functions in its literal sense of making us secure or protected from perils (of evil). Once it is strengthened and habituated, it is our strengthened conscience that keeps evil motivations and impulses in check and makes us act only on righteous motivations. It is in this sense that *taqwā* can be equated with developed human conscience.³⁴

32 This verse was revealed in the context of a mosque built by hypocrites in order to sow division among the Muslims. Ibn Kathīr makes the following comment on it: 'Allah the Exalted says that the *Masjid* that has been built on the basis of *Taqwā* of Allah and His pleasure is not the same as a *Masjid* that has been built based on causing harm, disbelief and causing division among the believers, and as an outpost for those who warred against Allah and His Messenger. The latter built their *Masjid* on the edge of a steep hole'. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, vol. 4, pp. 518–19. The verse seems to distinguish clearly what is built on the basis of *taqwā* from what is built on the basis of hypocrisy. I think that we can deduce from the verse that *taqwā* is the best foundation, not only for a physical building but for human character and life in general.

33 Also see Q. 2:189, 3:13, 3:133, 3:200, 5:100, 11:49, 78:31, 13:35 and 15:45, among others.

34 For further analysis of this equation, see Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, pp. 20 and 29, as well as Adeel, *Epistemology of the Quran*, Chapter 4.

This process of strengthening of *taqwā* involves our rational understanding of the situation, as well as the impulse or motivation in which we are acting. As noted above, the Qur'an explicitly links understanding and *taqwā* in Q. 2:197, 5:100 and 65:10. Q. 5:100 is the key for understanding the Qur'anic link between *taqwā* and the epistemic state of understanding: 'Say, "Not equal are the evil and the good, although the abundance of evil might impress you". So, fear God (*fa-ittaqū*), O you of understanding, that you may be successful'. The verse asks people of understanding to have *taqwā* or clearly distinguish right from wrong in order to attain *falāḥ* or comprehensive success. In other words, our understanding of a situation or a motivation through which we are acting can be used to distinguish right from wrong in that situation or motivation. It helps sharpen our *taqwā* or ability to distinguish right from wrong. This boils down to saying that our understanding of a situation X can be used to determine what the right thing is for us to do in situation X. But such a determination can be undertaken by understanding only if it turns upon itself and evaluates as to what is its best (ethical) use in that situation. This, therefore, becomes reflective understanding or meta-understanding in this sense. It is such meta-understanding that the Qur'an calls *ḥikma* (wisdom).³⁵ Rational understanding, therefore, plays a basic role in underpinning the development of our conscience.

I have outlined the Qur'anic concepts of understanding and wisdom in the first section above. As I noted, understanding according to the Qur'an is holistic as a cognitive state, and it boils down to three things: understanding is gained by grasping the deeper logical and interpretive implications of principles, phenomena or stories; understanding is involved in grasping the ethical and wiser course; and understanding is involved with mastery of a language. Additionally, understanding has the function of determining how our understanding of a situation X can best be used for righteous action in situation X. This meta-understanding or reflective understanding is also called *ḥikma* by the Qur'an and strengthens and sharpens our *taqwā*. In a nutshell, such an understanding presupposes knowledge and reinforces human conscience in selecting the righteous course in every practical decision.

Concluding Remarks

The foregoing analysis of the epistemological foundations of Qur'anic ethics shows two things. First, that Qur'anic ethics is based on the concept of conscience, which has an initial natural form and an acquired developed

35 For a detailed discussion of the Qur'anic concepts of understanding and wisdom, see Adeel, *Epistemology of the Quran*, Chapters 5 and 7.

form equivalent to *taqwā*. The initial form of this conscience is identical to *al-nafs al-lawwāma*. Second, that this conscience is strengthened by human (rational) understanding when understanding turns upon itself to find the best use for itself in relation to the choice of an action. If this analysis is in the right direction generally, then it follows that Qur'anic ethics is not a form of divine voluntarism or theistic subjectivism as the dominant theological tradition of Islam, Ash'arism, has held.³⁶ It is not a consequentialist ethics either. In addition, it follows that the Qur'anic view of virtue overlaps with dominant reason-based views of virtue in the Western tradition, such as that of Socrates, Aristotle and Kant. However, I argue for these two latter points elsewhere.

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36 This characterisation of the Ash'arī position is that of George Hourani in his 1960 article 'Two Theories of Value in Medieval Islam'. It should be noted that Hourani's position has been challenged by Ayman Shihadeh in his 2016 chapter 'Theories of Ethical Value in *Kalām*: A New Interpretation'. Shihadeh has argued that the Ash'arī position was a more developed anti-realism that later became the basis for a consequentialist view of ethics.

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CHAPTER 15

Individualism and Anti-individualism in Islamic Epistemology

John Greco

Introduction¹

Contemporary epistemology has recently taken a social turn, focusing attention on the nature and variety of social epistemic dependence – that is, our epistemic dependence on other persons and on features of the broader social environment. In this context, a number of social epistemologists have levelled criticisms of traditional epistemology as overly ‘individualist’ and have argued for anti-individualist accounts of various epistemic phenomena, such as testimonial evidence and the transmission of knowledge. Likewise, social epistemologists have re-evaluated the nature and importance of epistemic authority, as well as the importance of epistemic communities more generally.

Elsewhere, I have argued for a social turn in religious epistemology, and especially for the Abrahamic faiths, where epistemic issues around testimony, prophecy, scripture, revelation, authority and community are of central importance.² For example, I have argued that a social turn is fruitful for re-evaluating a number of well-known objections to the rationality of religious belief, insofar as those objections are premised on individualist assumptions.³ More generally, several resources in contemporary social

1 For helpful discussion, I would like to thank the participants at the symposium ‘Imagining Islamic Epistemology for the 21st Century’, hosted by the Cambridge Muslim College in July 2022. I would also like to thank Anthony Booth, Safaruk Chowdhury and Ramon Harvey for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

2 For example, see Greco, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, Chapter 9, ‘Social Religious Epistemology’.

3 For example, objections based on religious disagreement and religious pluralism, the problem of divine hiddenness and Hume’s famous objection to belief in miracles based on testimony. See Greco, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, Chapter 9; and Greco, ‘Religious Knowledge in the Context of Conflicting Testimony’.

epistemology seem tailor-made for understanding the epistemology of religious belief in the Abrahamic traditions.

In the present chapter, I turn my attention to the Islamic tradition specifically and ask how a social turn might be fruitful there. The first part of the chapter proposes a particular conception of social epistemic dependence – one that is helpful, I argue, for understanding what is at issue between individualists and anti-individualists in epistemology. To anticipate, I will argue that social epistemic dependence is best conceived as a kind of ‘vulnerable’ dependence. That is, it is a dependence on other persons (or on other aspects of one’s social environment), with no guarantee that those persons (or environment) are dependable. We can gloss ‘no guarantee’ in epistemic terms: vulnerable dependence is dependence without knowledge that others are dependable. Anti-individualists allow for vulnerable dependence in the epistemic domain. Individualists do not.

The second part of the chapter will ask whether Islamic epistemology should be understood as individualist or anti-individualist. In the present formulation, it asks whether Islamic epistemology allows for vulnerable dependence in the epistemic domain. Two issues will receive particular attention in this regard. First, how does the Islamic tradition understand the epistemology of testimony, especially with respect to the testimony of prophecy, as found in the Qur’an and the Hadith? Second, to what extent does the Islamic tradition endorse an intellectual division of labour within Islamic communities? We can ask these questions both about Islamic authors and about Islam itself. That is, we can ask both (1) are particular Islamic authors best interpreted as individualists or anti-individualists with respect to these questions? and (2) how is the epistemology of religious belief best understood in an Islamic context? To be clear, I will not try to answer these questions. I do not have the requisite expertise. Rather, my purpose is to raise what I take to be interesting and important questions, using some resources from contemporary social epistemology to do so.

Part 1: Social Epistemology and Social Epistemic Dependence⁴

Again, a central theme in contemporary social epistemology is that there are important and under-appreciated phenomena involving social epistemic dependence – that is, epistemic dependence on other persons and on other features of the broader social environment. Epistemologies that are inconsistent with this kind of dependence are labeled ‘individualist’, whereas epistemologies that accommodate it are labeled ‘anti-individualist’. But how should the relevant notion of social epistemic dependence be understood? That is, what characterisation of social epistemic dependence is most theoretically useful?

4 This section draws from Greco, ‘What is Social Epistemic Dependence?’.

Several considerations are relevant here. First, as noted above, a prominent theme in social epistemology is that traditional epistemology has overlooked, and fails to accommodate, important phenomena of social epistemic dependence. In this sense, traditional epistemology is said to be overly individualist.⁵ A closely related theme is the rejection of Enlightenment ideals of intellectual autonomy and self-sufficiency.⁶ A more adequate social epistemology, it is argued, constitutes a needed corrective in these respects, precisely because it reveals and theorises important relations of social epistemic dependence.

A third consideration regards debates within social epistemology itself. Here, contemporary views are sorted into categories of 'individualism' and 'anti-individualism', precisely insofar as they affirm or reject some relevant relation of epistemic dependence. For example, reductionism in the epistemology of testimony is considered to be a paradigmatically individualist view, insofar as it makes testimonial justification entirely a function of the individual hearer's own evidence; for example, evidence that the speaker is competent in the relevant domain, or otherwise trustworthy. Other debates in social epistemology also involve issues around social epistemic dependence; for example, those that concern the division of epistemic labour, the nature and role of intellectual authority, and the importance of epistemic communities.⁷

An adequate characterisation of social epistemic dependence should illuminate these various themes and debates. In this respect, it is clear that a merely causal notion of social epistemic dependence will not do the job. For example:

A phenomenon involves social epistemic dependence just in case it involves some epistemic property *causally* depending on other persons, or on other features of the broader social environment.

Alternatively:

A person S manifests social epistemic dependence just in case S's epistemic standing *causally* depends on other persons, or on other features of the broader social environment.

5 For example, see Coady, *Testimony*; Goldberg, 'Analytic Social Epistemology'; and Grasswick, 'Feminist Social Epistemology'.

6 See Coady, *Testimony*; Grasswick, 'Feminist Social Epistemology'; Hardwig, 'Epistemic Dependence'; McMyler, *Testimony, Trust, and Authority*; and Greco, 'Intellectual Humility and Contemporary Epistemology'.

7 See Broncano-Berrocal and Vega-Encabo, 'A Taxonomy of Types of Epistemic Dependence'; and Goldman and O'Connor, 'Social Epistemology'. See also Greco, 'Intellectual Humility and Contemporary Epistemology'.

The problem with these formulations is that it is uncontroversial that epistemic standing can be dependent in this way. For example, it is trivial that we causally depend on other persons for our education and for other aspects of our intellectual training. Accordingly, these formulations mischaracterise what is really at issue between individualist and anti-individualist views in social epistemology. Likewise, this cannot be what is at issue in critiques of traditional epistemology, or in the rejection of Enlightenment values. Enlightenment authors such as Kant and Locke, for example, do not deny that much of what one knows causally depends on one's prior education and training.

A more promising approach views social epistemic dependence as a kind of metaphysical dependence. We find this understanding of social epistemic dependence in the work of Sanford Goldberg.⁸ Goldberg has framed his central idea in terms of 'supervenience': in cases of social epistemic dependence, a person's epistemic properties supervene on the epistemic properties of other persons. Moreover, it is clear that Goldberg understands supervenience to be a dependence relation. Goldberg's idea is that at least some epistemic properties of persons metaphysically depend on the epistemic properties of other persons in their community. Put differently, at least some epistemic properties are metaphysically 'grounded in' or 'in virtue of the epistemic properties of other persons.'⁹ Hence:

In cases of social epistemic dependence, a person's epistemic properties *metaphysically depend* on the epistemic properties of other persons.

Goldberg's account advances our understanding of social epistemic dependence in at least two ways. First, it helps to clarify the strength of the relevant dependence relation by invoking the notion of metaphysical dependence, or metaphysical grounding. Second, the account broadens the scope of social epistemic dependence, so as to include phenomena beyond reliance on testimony and appeals to authority. Thus, Goldberg's formulation allows for 'direct' epistemic dependence on other persons, such as testifiers and authorities, but also 'diffuse' epistemic dependence on broader features of the social environment; for example, how

8 For example, see Goldberg, 'The Division of Epistemic Labor'.

9 On standard formulations, supervenience is not itself a dependence relation, but is entailed by metaphysical dependence relations, such as metaphysical grounding. We can remain neutral on various substantive controversies around supervenience, metaphysical grounding, and how the two are related. For present purposes, the important point is that a grounding relation is supposed to be both modally strong and explanatory. For discussion, see McLaughlin and Bennett, 'Supervenience'.

an epistemic community is organised so as to promote (or undermine) the flow of quality information. We will return to this theme in the second part of the chapter, when we consider issues involving the division of intellectual labour.

Despite these advances, however, Goldberg's account is inadequate as it stands. As noted above, we want an account of social epistemic dependence that is adequate to the theoretical purposes of social epistemology. And this includes the ways in which social epistemology understands the distinction between individualism and anti-individualism, as these are manifested both in the history of philosophy and in contemporary social epistemology itself. Accordingly, an adequate account ought to plausibly sort individualist and anti-individualist views. At the very least, it ought to correctly sort paradigmatically individualist and anti-individualist views. However, Goldberg's account fails to do this.

To see the point, recall that Goldberg's account is formulated in terms of a grounding thesis. Specifically, a theory of justification or knowledge allows for social epistemic dependence, in Goldberg's sense, just in case it allows that some epistemic properties metaphysically depend on the epistemic properties of other persons. The problem is that paradigmatically individualist views are consistent with this kind of dependence, and so Goldberg's account fails to properly sort individualist and anti-individualist views.

To illustrate this problem, consider Humean reductionism in the epistemology of testimony, which is widely recognised to be a paradigmatically individualistic view. According to this view, testimonial justification and knowledge are simply species of inductive justification and knowledge, and therefore entirely a function of the hearer's own resources for gaining inductive justification and knowledge more generally. In effect, testimonial justification and knowledge reduce to inductive justification and knowledge about testifiers and testimony.¹⁰ Consider the following version of this view:

Standard Reductionism about Testimonial Knowledge (SRTK):
A hearer H has testimonial knowledge that *p* just in case H has inductive knowledge *that the speaker knows that p*.

It is easy to see that SRTK entails that testimonial knowledge metaphysically depends on the epistemic properties of other persons. Specifically, a hearer's testimonial knowledge constitutively depends on the speaker's having knowledge. On Goldberg's understanding of social epistemic dependence,

10 For present purposes, we need not get into verbal disputes about how to understand 'reductionism', or textual disputes about how to understand Hume. Rather, we can simply stipulate as above.

SRTK allows for social epistemic dependence and, hence, counts as an anti-individualist view. Again, Goldberg's account fails to sort views correctly.

To see what is going wrong here, return to the notion of 'vulnerable dependence' introduced earlier. In this context, we may distinguish between 'verified dependence' and vulnerable dependence. Verified dependence, in the sense intended, involves knowing that those on whom you depend are dependable, that those on whom you rely are reliable. Vulnerable dependence, in the sense intended, comes with no such guarantee. What I am suggesting is that our target phenomenon is better understood as vulnerable dependence rather than verified dependence. Again, even Humean reductionists can allow that we depend on others for testimonial justification and knowledge. What they cannot allow is that we do so without guarantee or assurance of reliability.

All this suggests the following characterisation of social epistemic dependence, now understood as a kind of vulnerable dependence. To simplify our formulation, let us assume that any person on which S socially depends is part of a relevant social environment. This allows us to characterise social epistemic dependence in terms of social environments *simpliciter*, rather persons and/or social environments. We then have:

A subject S *epistemically depends* on a social environment E for S's knowledge that *p* just in case:

1. S's having knowledge that *p* metaphysically depends on some epistemic property ψ of E; and
2. S's having knowledge that *p* does not metaphysically depend on S's knowledge that E has ψ .

Two points of clarification are in order here. First, condition 1 is meant to capture Goldberg's insight that social epistemic dependence is best understood in terms of metaphysical dependence. Condition 2 adds what is missing from Goldberg – the idea that social epistemic dependence, properly understood, is vulnerable dependence. Second, condition 2 states that, in cases of social epistemic dependence, S need not know that other persons or the broader environment have the properties that she is depending on. But this is consistent with weaker epistemic requirements on S – for example, that S is not irrational in thinking that a speaker is reliable. This is as it should be, insofar as condition 2 is supposed to state a requirement of vulnerable dependence. But vulnerable dependence need not be unreasonable or irrational dependence, or carry no epistemic restrictions at all. Rather, it involves a lack of guarantee or assurance that what is depended on is dependable, that what is relied on is reliable. Condition 2 is intended to capture that idea of no guarantee or assurance.

The above formulation is stated in terms of knowledge, but we can generalise as follows. Consider any epistemic property ϕ ,

A subject S *epistemically depends* on a social environment E for epistemic property ϕ just in case, for some proposition p and social environment E :

1. S 's having ϕ with respect to S 's belief that p metaphysically depends on some epistemic property ψ of E ; and
2. S 's having ϕ with respect to S 's belief that p does not metaphysically depend on S 's having ϕ (or some more demanding epistemic property) with respect to S 's belief that E has ψ .

I propose that the present account has all of the theoretical advantages that we were looking for above. First, the account preserves Goldberg's insight that social epistemic dependence is best conceived as a metaphysical dependence relation, not mere causal dependence. Second, the account nicely illuminates critiques of traditional epistemology, including critiques of Enlightenment ideals of intellectual autonomy and self-sufficiency. Finally, I propose that the account helpfully illuminates what is at stake in several debates in contemporary social epistemology. In particular, the account plausibly sorts views into individualist and anti-individualist camps, and it does so in a principled way.¹¹

With this account in hand, the next order of business is to consider whether and how Islamic epistemologies allow for social epistemic dependence. Or, to frame the question differently, how is the Islamic tradition best understood in this regard?

Part 2: Social Epistemic Dependence and Islamic Epistemology

A good way to begin is to consider Anthony Booth's discussion of knowledge of God in Islam. In the passages below, Booth discusses a position that he labels 'Evidentialism' and considers its implications in the Islamic context. According to Evidentialism, ...

... only our evidence justifies belief; we ought to believe in accordance with the evidence. Slightly more formulaically, we can express it like this:

Evidentialism: A subject S is justified in believing any proposition that p just in case S has sufficient evidence for believing that p .

11 I say 'propose' because I have not properly argued for these claims here. For more extensive discussion, see my 'What is Social Epistemic Dependence?' and 'Social Virtue Epistemology'.

According to Evidentialism, because only evidence can justify belief there can be no non-evidential, non-epistemic (justificatory) reasons for belief.¹²

As Booth notes, Evidentialism has implications for the relationship between faith and reason. In particular, 'since religious beliefs are *beliefs*, then they too are justified by evidence and nothing else'.¹³ Again:

... according to the Evidentialist, saying that a belief is supported by sufficient evidence *is* to say that the belief is justified (is a belief that one ought to have). According to the Evidentialist then, to say that one ought to believe a religious proposition – such as the proposition that there is a God – is the same thing as saying that we have sufficient evidence for that proposition. For the Evidentialist, therefore, there can be no tension between faith (that is, religious belief) and reason.¹⁴

Booth sees this position represented in the Mu'tazilī theological tradition, and in particular in al-Kindī. But he also notes two problems for Evidentialism in the Islamic context. First, it is a core tenet of Islam that all persons have an obligation to believe in God. But is it realistic to understand this obligation in the way that Evidentialism does? That is, is it realistic to think that all persons are obligated to base their religious beliefs in the kinds of reasons that Evidentialism requires? One reason to answer 'no' is that not all persons have the time and resources to do so. To put the point somewhat differently, it is unrealistic to think that all persons can or should be scholars or philosophers. We return to this point below, in the context of questions about the intellectual division of labour.

A second worry for Evidentialism regards the role of prophecy in Islam. If religious belief can be grounded in reason and evidence, then why is prophecy needed? In fact, if religious belief ought to be grounded in reason and evidence, then what role does prophecy play at all in the life of a good Muslim? Of course, the two problems are related. Evidentialism seems overly strict in requiring that all persons base their religious beliefs in good evidence. But once that requirement is in place, it becomes unclear what role prophecy plays in the life of a good believer who, by hypothesis, grounds their belief in evidence rather than something else.

It is fairly clear that, at least on Booth's interpretation, the Evidentialism of the Mu'tazilīs and al-Kindī is a version of individualism. This is

12 Booth, *Analytic Islamic Philosophy*, p. 53.

13 Booth, *Analytic Islamic Philosophy*, p. 54.

14 Booth, *Analytic Islamic Philosophy*, p. 9.

because Evidentialism makes the epistemic status of belief a function of the individual believer's epistemic resources – in this case, the believer's own reasoning and evidence. The next question to ask is whether there are anti-individualist alternatives within the Islamic tradition. To pursue this question, I will consider two positions that have received recent attention in Islamic epistemology: al-Fārābī's 'Moderate Evidentialism' and Ash'arī/Māturīdī 'Sensible Evidentialism'.

Islamic Moderate Evidentialism

Booth claims that the central problem facing al-Fārābī is the following: how can we verify the veracity of the Prophet, without at once obviating the unique epistemic function of prophecy?¹⁵ Accordingly, al-Fārābī's epistemology is centrally concerned with one of the two problems for Islamic Evidentialism identified above. Booth notes that an analogous problem occurs in contemporary epistemology: 'the problem is a general one concerning *epistemic expertise*: how do we ascertain that a putative expert's claims are true, without ourselves becoming experts?'¹⁶ One answer in the contemporary literature, endorsed by Alvin Goldman in his 2001 paper, 'Experts: Which Ones Should You Trust?', is that the layperson can have indirect evidence for expertise. In other words, the layperson can use their own observations to determine that some speaker S is an expert in domain D, and that therefore the claims of S in D are likely true. Booth remarks:

This process will give the layperson what Goldman calls 'indirect justification', which is grounded by an inference to the best explanation: certain properties of the [expert and her claims] are such that cannot be explained (or are simply best explained) except by the proposition that the expert is a trustworthy source of testimony on the given domain.¹⁷

For Goldman, these properties include various markers of expertise, such as professional or public reputation, as well as 'rhetorical superiority' in presenting evidence, answering objections and so on. The key idea, however, is that these kinds of properties are accessible to non-experts and can therefore be used as evidence of expert status, and hence as indirect evidence for the truth of expert claims.

According to Booth, this allows for a moderation of Evidentialism in al-Fārābī. According to Islamic Moderate Evidentialism, it is experts in

15 Booth, *Analytic Islamic Philosophy*, p. 76.

16 Booth, *Analytic Islamic Philosophy*, p. 76.

17 Booth, *Analytic Islamic Philosophy*, p. 77.

particular, rather than persons in general, who are subject to the evidentialist requirement:

The modulation here regards the *subjects* that Evidentialism applies to. Here al-Farabi elaborates on a thought that features in Plato's *Republic* – that God does not mete out capacities for rational thought in equal measure throughout his subjects. As such, it is wrong-headed to assume that Evidentialism will apply to everyone without caveat.¹⁸

Specifically, the evidentialist principle that belief must always be based on evidence does apply to the 'epistemic elite'. But that same principle does not apply to everyone:

However, for those without the requisite capacity – the non-philosophers or the epistemic non-elite – they are allowed to believe for non-epistemic reasons, and on the basis of something that falls short of demonstrative proof.¹⁹

In particular, the 'epistemic non-elite' are allowed to believe on the basis of 'rhetorical ploys, symbolism and allegory' found in scripture and prophecy.²⁰ As Booth notes, al-Fārābī's position solves the problem of determining genuine prophets – the epistemic elite can use reason and evidence to carry out this verifying task. At the same time, the special role of prophecy in the life of believers is preserved:

... it is *in principle* possible to discern genuine prophets from counterfeits, since an epistemic elite will be able to test their claims against their demonstrative proof. But prophecy still has a unique function: to educate the non-elite – *via* symbols, rhetoric and allegory – something approaching a truth that they would not be able to discover left to their own devices.²¹

Does al-Fārābī's position count as a version of anti-individualism? That depends primarily on two further questions. First, does al-Fārābī think that the religious beliefs of non-epistemic elites have positive epistemic standing? For example, when non-epistemic elites form their beliefs on the basis of genuine prophecy, do those beliefs thereby count as knowledge?

18 Booth, *Analytic Islamic Philosophy*, p. 78.

19 Booth, *Analytic Islamic Philosophy*, p. 78.

20 Booth, *Analytic Islamic Philosophy*, p. 78.

21 Booth, *Analytic Islamic Philosophy*, pp. 78–79.

If not knowledge, do they thereby count as epistemically rational, or reasonable, or responsible? Suppose that the answer is 'yes'. In that case, a second question arises. Supposing that the religious beliefs of non-elites do count as having positive epistemic standing, does al-Fārābī think that this standing depends on the epistemic non-elites having further beliefs with equally good positive epistemic standing? For example, does he think that knowledge through prophecy depends on prior knowledge that the prophecy is genuine? If the answer to this second question is 'no', then we have a version of anti-individualism. Put differently, non-elite knowledge through prophecy will satisfy both of the conditions for epistemic dependence, as that notion was defined earlier in this chapter.

As I have said above, it is not my intention to answer these questions about al-Fārābī's view myself. I simply do not have the expertise. But putting questions of interpretation aside, Booth's discussion of al-Fārābī does provide resources for an anti-individualist position.

First, consider what Moderate Islamic Evidentialism says about the reasons that epistemic non-elites have for believing. In some places, Booth describes these as 'non-epistemic reasons'. But he also describes them as 'short of demonstrative proof'. Regarding the latter phrase, the point is that there are epistemic reasons of varying quality, and the reasons of non-elites fall short of the highest quality. Consider the kinds of indirect evidence of expertise canvassed above. These would be epistemic reasons, although falling short of demonstrative proof. Accordingly, there are two possibilities regarding the reasons that epistemic non-elites have for believing: they are either (1) not epistemic reasons at all, or (2) epistemic, but not 'the best kind of epistemic reason'.²²

But second, it is plausible that the religious beliefs of non-epistemic elites can nevertheless have positive epistemic standing. Within an Islamic context, the idea would be that they have such standing because they are based on genuine prophecy. On one interpretation, this amounts to knowledge, even if not the best kind of knowledge. On another, such beliefs are not knowledge, but they are epistemically rational or reasonable, at least in the sense of being epistemically blameless.

Putting the points of these last two paragraphs together, we now have the resources for an 'Islamic Anti-individualism'. Such a view endorses the following three claims, which together entail anti-individualism as defined above:

1. A person who forms true beliefs about God on the basis of genuine prophecy thereby comes to have some positive epistemic standing ϕ regarding these beliefs about God.

22 Booth, *Analytic Islamic Philosophy*, p. 78.

2. In such a case, this is partly *because* the prophet in question knows these things about God; that is, because the prophet in question is a genuine prophet.
3. It is not necessary that such a person believe with positive epistemic standing ϕ (or better) that the prophet knows these things.

One way to think of the present position is as a transmission view. In cases of genuine prophecy, the knowledge of the prophet is transmitted to the believer. By believing the prophet, the believer comes to know what the prophet knows and teaches. On the present interpretation, this is an anti-individualist version of a transmission view. The believer's coming to know does not depend on prior knowledge that the prophet knows, or at least not on knowledge of the same quality that is transmitted. Again, recall Goldman's indirect evidence of expertise in a domain. This kind of evidence is available to epistemic non-elites, and perhaps it is required for the epistemically responsible belief that some speaker is a genuine prophet. A possible view is that, once such evidence is in place, this creates a context that enables the transmission of higher-quality knowledge.

Islamic Sensible Evidentialism

In recent work, Enis Doko and Jamie B. Turner consider a different view that might be interpreted as Islamic Anti-individualism.²³ Specifically, Doko and Turner note that some Ash'arī thinkers distinguished between an individual obligation and a communal obligation regarding the classical *kalām* duty to know God through rational reflection and proof. In this context, Doko and Turner cite the following text from the Ash'arī theologian Abū al-Qāsim al-Anṣārī:

Since it is a fact that rational inquiry is in principle obligatory, it is obligatory for *the community as a whole*. Whether it is, however, an obligation of *every individual* is something based on a principle that explains how one achieves adequate knowledge of God and of His attributes and His Apostles and the particular teaching of Islam. The followers of our school disagree on this: (1) Some of them hold that what is required is belief that is founded in a definitive, rational proof of what one is obliged to believe and accordingly his belief in what he believes is thus a true knowing [. . .] (2) Some of them hold that belief must be based on proof (*dalīl*), but that the proof may be one given in revelation (*sam'ī*), either in the text of the Scripture and the Sunna or from the consensus of the community; and it

23 Doko and Turner, 'Islamic Religious Epistemology'.

may be purely rational (*'aqlī*) [...] (3) Some of them say that what is required is a belief that apperceives its object as it really is and as such; accordingly, belief in it, so characterized, is knowledge.²⁴

Doko and Turner suggest that one way of interpreting al-Anṣārī here is along the lines of Stephen Wykstra's 'sensible evidentialism'.²⁵ According to Wykstra, theistic belief would be epistemically defective if there were no good evidence for theism. It is not required, however, that every theist base their belief on that evidence, or even be aware of it. Rather, such evidence must be available in the community more broadly.

The issue [...] is whether theistic belief is evidence essential. Evidentialists answer 'Yes': their fundamental claim is that if theistic belief is to be free of deep epistemic defectiveness, it is essential that an evidential case for it be available to the theistic community. So construed, evidentialism does not extravagantly entail that individual theists need always base their theistic belief on their own inference from this evidence, or even that they need to know what the evidence is [...] it does not even entail that all theists, to be *rational* in their belief, take such evidence to be available. Since evidentialism so construed avoids these extravagances, I shall call it 'sensible evidentialism'.²⁶

Wykstra compares theistic belief to 'electron belief' – that is, belief that electrons exist. There is a sense in which electron belief requires evidence for positive epistemic standing. It is not true, however, that every individual must base their belief on that evidence:

... we allow that one can properly believe in electrons through spontaneous trust in the say-so of school teachers. But although person A might so believe by trusting the say-so of person B, and B by similarly trusting C, we take it that this chain of testimony is, *somewhere in the community*, anchored in something other than testimony. And for

24 Frank, 'Knowledge and Taqlīd', pp. 46–47.

25 Stephen Wykstra, 'Toward a Sensible Evidentialism'. According to Booth's Islamic Moderate Evidentialism, it is the community's intellectual elites in particular rather than individuals in general who are subject to an evidentialist requirement. According to Wykstra's Sensible Evidentialism, as here understood, it is the broader community rather than individuals who are subject to an evidentialist requirement. According to this understanding, Moderate Evidentialism is a species of Sensible Evidentialism, insofar as the former specifies how the broader community must satisfy the relevant evidentialist requirement.

26 Wykstra, 'Toward a Sensible Evidentialism', p. 433.

electrons, we take this ‘something other’ to be an *evidential* case for electrons. Thus, though we may not know what the scientific evidence for electrons is, we take it that such evidence is *available* to us the *community* of electron believers. The role of epistemic community is vital [...] So it is in some *communitarian* sense – not ‘individualistically’ – that we take evidence to be available for our electron belief.²⁷

A natural way to interpret Wykstra here is along anti-individualist lines. The idea is that non-expert members of the community do have positive epistemic standing for their belief, but in virtue of expertise that resides elsewhere in the community. Crucially, to enjoy the epistemic benefits of community expertise, non-experts need not have prior knowledge that such evidence exists, or that it is good evidence. Rather, it is their membership in the community that is doing the epistemic job.

Doko and Turner do not endorse this interpretation of al-Anṣārī, but they do suggest that it is a possible understanding. They also point to recent work by Ramon Harvey on Māturīdī theology, where Harvey suggests that al-Māturīdī’s own religious epistemology might be understood in a similar way.²⁸ Citing Harvey, Doko and Turner conclude that, even if this kind of view is not dominant within the *kalām* tradition, it is perhaps at least compatible with it and evident in some of its circles.²⁹

Conclusion: Epistemic Communities and Epistemic Division of Labour

In effect, both Moderate Evidentialism and Sensible Evidentialism propose an epistemic division of labour, one that offloads evidential responsibilities to experts in the religious community, and in a way that provides epistemic benefits to non-experts. It is plausible, I want to suggest, that some religious communities are designed to do exactly this. In Goldberg’s terminology, some communities are ‘epistemically engineered’:

What I call an *epistemically engineered environment* is an environment that has been deliberately designed so as to decrease the cognitive burden on individual subjects in their attempts to acquire knowledge [...] the sort of epistemically engineered environment I am interested [in] are those environments designed to decrease the cognitive burden on individuals ...³⁰

27 Wykstra, ‘Toward a Sensible Evidentialism’, p. 430.

28 Ramon Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World*, p. 17.

29 Doko and Turner, ‘Islamic Religious Epistemology’, p. 156.

30 Goldberg, ‘Epistemically Engineered Environments’, p. 2795.

Importantly, Goldberg thinks that the individuals who benefit from such an environment can be 'largely oblivious to all of this'. In other words, Goldberg is here adopting an anti-individualist understanding of the division of epistemic labour.

Can Islamic communities be understood as epistemically engineered in this sense? Have they been understood that way by some elements of the tradition? Again, I am offering only questions here, not answers. What I do claim is that these are interesting questions regarding the epistemology of religious belief in an Islamic context, which is also a social context.

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Afterword: Epistemological Themes Revisited

Safaruk Chowdhury and Ramon Harvey

The intention behind this coda is to tie together some of the themes that have emerged from the pages of the volume, letting us reveal certain patterns within the nascent subfield of analytic Islamic epistemology. The observations offered here were sparked by moments of insight during the process of compiling and editing the preceding chapters.

Starting with a direct connection between the nature of God and human knowledge, Hannah Erlwein (Chapter 4), Laura Hassan (Chapter 5) and Ayşenur Ünügür-Tabur (Chapter 7) explore in diverse ways how the Ash'arī focus on divine sovereignty, particularly as expressed within the distinctive doctrine of occasionalism, may impact the possibility of the acquisition of knowledge. The key worry is that, if – as Ash'arīs are often wont to uphold – there is no space for necessary connections between things within the created order, how can they ground arguments for the existence of God that rely on the observation of the apparently causal links in the interactions of physical objects, and even between the process and outcome of mental reasoning? The intellectual burden taken on by the figures studied, who include such luminaries as al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī, is to find a way to dissolve this conflict. The authors of these three chapters point out that, although solutions to these problems are available, they may result in significant reconfigurations of earlier epistemic models and the emergence of new questions to address.

Exploring the social dimension of human epistemic life in different ways, we have presented Anthony Booth's study of al-Fārābī (Chapter 1), Aaron Spevack's examination of mass transmission within postclassical theology (Chapter 6) and John Greco's piece on anti-individualism in Islamic epistemology (Chapter 15). Albeit in many respects exploring quite different strands of the Islamic tradition, the Moderate Evidentialism of al-Fārābī's philosophy and the Sensible Evidentialism arguably to

be found in the Ash'arī and Māturīdī theological traditions are alike in taking account of the variegation of expertise within human society and in not expecting every person to be epistemically autonomous. Beyond the interesting individual arguments made within these chapters, their authors show that elements of premodern Islamic thought were sensitive to the kinds of concerns raised today by proponents of the 'social turn' within analytic epistemology and were able to draw nuanced distinctions between uncritical followers and critical common believers, as well as expert theologians and philosophers.

Yet for some scholars in a range of traditions within Islam and Christianity – historical and contemporary – the idea of an epistemic hierarchy between common and expert believers, at least in core matters of religious life, such as warranted knowledge of God's existence, is an anathema. Thus, in Jon Hoover's study of Sunnī Traditionalism (Chapter 2), Amir Emami's look at the Shī'ī school Maktab-i Tafsīk (Chapter 8), Jamie Turner's constructive Taymiyyan epistemology (Chapter 10), Erik Baldwin's Plantingian response to Turner (Chapter 11), K. Scott Oliphint's Christian-theistic epistemology (Chapter 12) and, to some extent, Kelly Clarke's friendly advice (Chapter 13), there is sustained attention to a common externalist approach in thinking about epistemic justification that highlights the warranted nature of beliefs without highly technical argument. Emphasis is placed instead on alternative sources, such as a strong epistemic role for the *fiṭra* or the *sensus divinitatis*. Perhaps due to the prominence of this area of study in the contemporary epistemological landscape, the debate on this topic is notably more refined than on some of the other engagements charted in this book. Proponents from all sides have thus been able to move beyond initial scoping to provide sophisticated counter-proposals to each other.

Finally, even though most contributions to this volume concern philosophical and theological arguments on epistemological topics, some also include consideration of spiritual or mystical knowledge claims. In Harith Ramli's piece on early Sufism (Chapter 3), David Worsley's investigation of second-person knowledge of God (Chapter 9) and M. Ashraf Adeel's account of the ethical dimension of human epistemic faculties in the Qur'an (Chapter 14), attention is paid to a heightened kind of knowing, especially in relation to God. These authors round out the book's coverage by highlighting various experiential dimensions of human cognisance and their relationship to the worship, spiritual practices and direct contact with the divine that are at the core of a fully realised religious life.

These themes, then, not only illustrate the riches present in this volume but show that the chapters collected in each of the five parts of the book are closely linked to those in others, even across the conventional disciplinary boundaries of intellectual history, comparative religion, philosophy of

religion and analytic epistemology. Although the leitmotif of this book is the justification of belief, many other important themes in religious epistemology await sustained attention through an Islamic lens. We hope that our volume opens the way for the advancement of that work, the breaking down of often arbitrary disciplinary barriers and the search for better understanding of the ultimate truths of our lives.

Glossary of Arabic Epistemological Terminology

ahl al-naẓar wa-l-istidlāl – reflective evidentialists
a'māl al-qulūb – internal actions
'aqīda – creed
'aql – intellect, reason
'ayn al-yaqīn – the eye or essence of certainty
badīhī – self-evident
bāṭin – esoteric knowledge
burhān – demonstrative proof
dalāla – indication
dalīl (pl. *dalā'il*) – evidence, proof, inference
dalīl 'aqlī qaṭ'i – absolutely certain rational proofs
ḍarūrī – necessary, immediate, non-inferential (knowledge)
dhāt – essence, essential nature; entity
dhikr – remembrance, memory
falāsifa – Muslim philosophers
falsafa – philosophy
fiqh – understanding; jurisprudence
fiṭra – natural disposition, natural constitution; innate knowledge
fikr (pl. *afkār*) – thought
ghā'ib – unseen or unexperienceable world
ḥaqq al-yaqīn – the truth of certainty
hawā – passions, desires
ḥikma – wisdom
ḥilm – forbearance
ḥiss mushtarak – common sense
ḥujja – proof
ilhām – (spiritual) inspiration
'illa – cause; determinant cause
'ilm – knowledge
'ilm al-kalām – dialectical theology, philosophical theology
'ilm al-naẓarī al-kasbī – inferential knowledge
'ilm al-yaqīn – the knowledge of certainty

- īmān* – belief, faith
isnād – chain of narration
istidlāl – inference, reasoning, deduction
i'tiqād – conviction
'iyān – sense perception
jahl – ignorance
kalām – dialectical theology, philosophical theology
kalām jadīd – renewed theology
kashf – unveiling
kasb – acquisition (of actions or knowledge)
khavar – report
khavar al-wāḥid – singularly narrated report
khāṭir (pl. *khawāṭir*) – inner motive power
khayāl – imagination
lammatān – two spirits (encouraging to good and evil)
madlūl – that which is indicated
makān – place, locus
ma'rifa – cognition; mystical knowledge
muḥaqqiqūn – verifying scholars
muḥāsaba – introspection
mukallaḥ – morally accountable person
muqallid – follower of traditional authority; uncritical adherent
mushāhada – perception
mutakhayyila – imaginative faculty
naḥs – self, soul
al-naḥs al-ammāra bi-l-sū' – the soul that persistently enjoins evil
al-naḥs al-lawwāma – the reproaching soul
al-naḥs al-muṭma'inna – the satisfied soul
naẓar – speculation, reflection
qalb – heart, mind
qudra – power, capacity
quwwa – power, potency
sabab (pl. *asbāb*) – cause, occasion; means
sam' – tradition; hearing
sam'ī – revealed, revelatory
shay' – thing
shāhid – visible or experienceable world
ṣifa (pl. *ṣifāt*) – attribute
ṣidq – truth
tadabbur – contemplation
tafakkur – cognition
taḥqīq – verification
taqlīd – following traditional authority; uncritical adherence
al-taqlīd fī al-īmān – following traditional authority in the matter of belief
taqwā – conscience, conscientiousness
taṣawwur – conception
tawātur – mass transmission

tawḥīd – monotheism, divine oneness, divine unity

wajd – divine encounter

wajh – aspect, configuration

wajh al-dalīl – aspect of the proof

wujūb al-maʿrifa – obligation to know (God)

wujūb al-naẓar – obligation to reflect

yaqīn – certitude

ẓāhir – exoteric knowledge

ẓann – supposition

Glossary of Analytic Epistemological Terminology

Analytic spirituality: A disciplined, reflective approach to understanding and engaging with spiritual or religious experiences, using the precision and clarity characteristic of analytic philosophy.

Analytic theology: A method of theology that uses the tools and methods of contemporary analytic philosophy to clarify and analyse theological claims.

Belief (epistemology): An attitude where someone accepts something as true, forming a mental state that underpins knowledge when justified and true.

Coherentism: The epistemic theory that all beliefs are justified by other beliefs.

Defeater: Information or evidence that undermines or challenges the justification of a belief, rendering it no longer reasonable to hold.

Dominican knowledge: Knowledge characterised by an intellectual, contemplative approach, often associated with the Thomistic emphasis on rational inquiry and speculative theology.

Epistemic luck: A situation in which a person acquires true belief through processes outside of their control or understanding, casting doubt on whether the belief counts as knowledge.

Evidential luck: The chance factor in whether one encounters evidence or not, impacting one's ability to hold justified beliefs.

Evidentialism: The view that beliefs should only be held if supported by sufficient evidence.

Externalism: The theory that the justification for a belief depends on factors external to a person's mental state, such as the reliability of the belief-forming process.

Foundationalism: The epistemic theory that some beliefs (that is, foundational or basic beliefs) are not justified by other beliefs.

Franciscan knowledge: A form of knowledge associated with the intuitive, affective, or experiential dimensions of understanding, emphasising a personal, relational knowing of God.

Ineffability (divine): The idea that certain aspects of the divine nature or mystical experience are beyond human comprehension or expression in language.

Internalism: The epistemological stance that justification for a belief depends on factors accessible to the person's consciousness or introspection.

Interpersonal knowledge: Knowledge gained through direct, personal interaction and relationship, often involving mutual awareness and understanding.

Objectual (holistic) understanding: A type of understanding that sees knowledge not merely as isolated facts but as interconnected, forming a coherent whole or 'object'.

Presuppositionalism: The epistemological position that all knowledge systems rest on fundamental assumptions that are taken as starting points without proof.

Proper function: The notion that human cognitive faculties are functioning as intended when they lead to true beliefs; critical to Alvin Plantinga's account of warrant and knowledge.

Properly basic belief: According to Alvin Plantinga, a belief that is rational to hold without evidence because it arises naturally within a properly functioning cognitive system.

Propositional belief: A belief in a specific claim or statement, typically expressed in a declarative sentence.

Reformed Epistemology: The view that belief in God can be rational without evidence if it is produced by properly functioning cognitive faculties.

Religious epistemology: The study of how beliefs in religious contexts are formed, justified and evaluated.

Second-person knowledge: Knowledge involving direct personal awareness of another's perspective, distinct from third-person observations or abstract understanding.

Sensible Evidentialism: A nuanced form of evidentialism proposed by Stephen Wykstra, suggesting that we should believe what is most reasonable given available evidence, acknowledging limitations and context.

Social epistemic dependence: The concept that our knowledge often depends on the testimony, insights, or expertise of others.

Social epistemology: The study of knowledge as it occurs in social contexts, focusing on communal aspects and the role of social practices in shaping knowledge.

Testimonial knowledge: Knowledge acquired through the testimony of others, relying on their credibility and reliability.

Warrant: A quality that, when added to true belief, results in knowledge; it involves the proper functioning of one's cognitive faculties in the right environment.

Wittgensteinian Fideism: An approach to religious epistemology inspired by Ludwig Wittgenstein that holds religious beliefs to be part of a distinct language game with its own internal logic and criteria for meaning and truth.

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